10 BRILLIANT STORIES

ARGOSY

JUNE, 1960

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TWO SHILLINGS
AND SIXPENCE

THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

RAY BRADBURY

MARGERY SHARP

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

SID CHAPLIN

JOHN SALT

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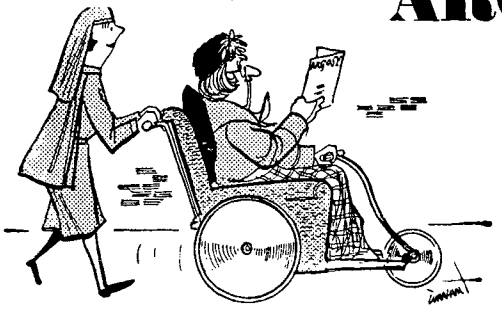

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

Vol. XXI

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Log Book

THERE has just come into our hands a monthly entitled The Maids, Wives, and Widows' Penny Magazine. Since Argosy is aimed at precisely none of these sections of the public, but, on the contrary, at Bachelors, Breadwinners, and Gay Old Boys, we thought it would be instructive to take a look and see what the other half of the world is up to.

The first thing that caught our eye, under Domestic Economy, seemed sensible enough: "A good quantity of old cheese is the best thing to eat, when distressed by eating too much fruit, or oppressed with any kind of food. Physicians have given it in cases of extreme danger. For a sudden attack of quinsy or croup, bathe the neck with bear's grease and pour it down the throat . . ." There are no bears *just* where we live, but we have already written off for a supply of grease.

Next came an edifying story—"A tradesman and his wife having had a bitter quarrel, in order to appease their fury they threw all the furniture out of the window. The wife then drew the bed to the window, ripped out the ticking, and set all the feathers afloat, then rushing to the banisters and breaking her arm upon them exclaimed, 'Now, you scoundrel, you must pay for a surgeon!'"

Of course this was before the Health Service.

Fashion note: "For walking dress, small simple bonnets of dahlia, Philippe, or Byron brown velvet, trimmed with gauze ribbon, and having no ornament under the crown but small *blonde brides*, are already determined on." (Their italics.)

Yippee; we're off to the hatshop round the corner.

Elsewhere, however, under the heading Fashions of the Week and a rather unexpected illustration, we found this forlorn note: "We regret this week having to apologise to our fair Patronesses.

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The TRUTH is always the best apology, and the truth is, that the parcel we receive each week, direct from Paris, has, by some accident (for which we cannot account) never reached our office. Under these circumstances and at a *late hour on Tuesday night* we have no alternative but to present our readers with a well-executed view of St. Paul's Cathedral . . ."

Awestruck admiration is our tribute to this editorial stroke, and we've sent Horatio, our nautical sub, off to St. Paul's just in case of a similar mishap in this office.

Useful information: If a gentleman wants a wife, he wears a ring of diamonds on the first finger of the left hand; if engaged, on the second finger; if married, on the third; and on the fourth if he never intends to be married. (On the fifth if polygamous?)

We have no diamonds, but Horatio has instructions to call at Woolworths on the way back, and in the meantime we're doing some quick thinking.

There aren't many advertisements in the Maids, Wives, and Widows; but one caught our eye—" Morison's Strengthener, or British Breakfast Powder. Superior to Tea, Coffee, or Chocolate. The Public have long felt the want of a Beverage of a more nutritious and aromatic nature than either of those, which leave a nervous, heating, and agitating sensation very injurious to health. Price: First sort, 1s. 6d.; Second ditto, 1s."

We're trying the first sort; we've been *wondering* what was up with our nerves.

And another advertisement: " The Pure Patent Brandy, 2s. 3d. per pint. London Cream Gin, 1s. 4d. per pint. Exchanged in case of disapproval."

Maids, wives, and widows surely led a gay life in the year 1832.

Margery Sharp lives a stone's throw from Piccadilly, writes her novels in longhand because she hates typewriters, and has been producing best-sellers for two decades. One of her early short stories was written to use up some illustrations—including a picture of an angry clergyman—left over from a Margaret Kennedy story. Excellent discipline, she said. *The Nutmeg Tree*, her first resounding success, both as play and novel, came out in 1937. Since then her titles read like a list of Derby winners—*Britannia Mews*, *The Foolish Gentlewoman*, *The Eye of Love*, to quote three. She devotes immense care to research on the details and backgrounds of her books, even more to those carefree opening sentences which, like smashing services, go straight to the middle of awkward situations.

Ray Bradbury, who has been beguiling Argosy readers with

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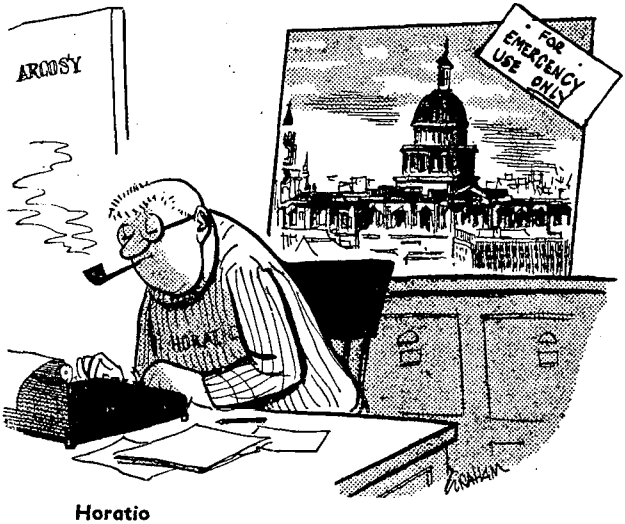
accounts of wild nights in Galway, writes us that these Irish stories, welded into a trio of one-act plays, will open on Broadway next autumn. A novel of his, *The Martian Chronicles*, will be filmed by MGM this year, and he's just finished another, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. He sent us a description of his life in Los Angeles—" Surrounded by women (they include four daughters, the youngest rising 1½) on this small isle, I do not wave for passing ships to rescue me. I happily bask . . . "

Sid Chaplin left school at fourteen and was apprenticed as a colliery blacksmith until, at the age of twenty-three, he won a scholarship to Fircroft College, where he studied economics, politics, and literature. His first short-story collection, *The Leaping Lad*, won an Atlantic Award. He has had three novels published of which the last, *The Big Room*, came out this spring.

Under the terms of The Argosy Award, the Special Prize of £50 was to be given at the discretion of the Judges (H. E. Bates, John Braine, Mary Stewart, Enid Love, and the Editor) for a story that they considered had some special qualities. This prize has been won by **James Leyland** for *The Prayer*. H. E. Bates said that this story has outstanding feeling for nature and the country. The writer was educated at a North country grammar school, took an English Honours degree at Oxford, has had a job with the B.B.C., and now teaches English.

JOHN SILVER



Horatio

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★ *With this story, James Leyland wins the Argosy Special Prize*

THE PRAYER

BY JAMES LEYLAND

SHE hung a row of little clouds on the line and bent down to her basket for more. The wind seized the clothes and cracked them as though it would tear them, too, into scudding, brilliant pieces like their elders in the sky.

Everything shone white: clouds, clothes, ducks, and, far away, the milky clearness of the limestone clints on Werburgh Fell. Even the grey stone of the farmhouse and barn looked as though it had been scrubbed clean and had dried in the sparkling morning sun.

She picked up the clothes-basket and, supporting it against her hip, stepped off the green drying-ground on to the flagged path. Her clogs made a crisp clatter as she moved to and fro, and soon a brishing noise told that she was rinsing down the wash-house. A tortoiseshell cat picked up its paws delicately and deigned to hurry before the sputtering drops that sprang out into the yard.

There was a low, throaty gabble and the duck led five solemn pieces of butter into the lane, thrusting with swaying rump under the bar of the gate and contriving to look worried and anxious as mothers with a brood do. A fleeting smile passed over Martha's face.

She went into the kitchen, stepping out of her clogs at the door and walking in her stockinged feet, for she had cleaned the place at seven o'clock. Going to the fire, she pulled forward a great pan which had been standing on the side hob, dipped a little finger delicately into it, then sucked it. With a slight nod of approval she carried the pan double-handed into the back kitchen and there poured off the warm milk into two bottles. Without looking up, she fumbled with her hands on an upper shelf and brought down two rubber teats which she snapped over the mouths of the bottles with an expert movement of the fingers.

She slipped a toe into each clog, pressing them firmly on; and

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with a bottle in each hand clattered round to the side paddock, unsnecking the gate with her elbow and pushing it to with her hip.

" Sook, sook, sook! " she called dulcetly, but the two wobbling little figures had already risen from the warmth of the sunny house wall and nudged her impatiently till she served them with their drink. She managed to feed them both together, for they were getting stronger now.

Used as she was to animals, her face softened as she looked at the nubby little horns, the tiny harsh curls, and the sooty faces of the two hill-lambs.

When they finished, she fondled them idly for a minute, looking dreamily at them. They followed her to the wicket gate and thrust their noses through as she shut them in, snuffling and bleating like idiot children.

It was when she was feeding the calves in the yard that she suddenly sighed. Only a moment before, she had looked up from the tossing bucket and, catching sight of the billowing clothes-line, had thought with satisfaction, " They're dry already. I'll get the ironing done before dinner." She liked the fresh, invigorating scent of wind-dried clothes. And then she sighed. It was the old thought which had slipped out into her mind like a trout from under a stone.

" Eh, it's lonesome here. I wish I had some childer."

Young things all around her year after year, but no young human beings. She was lonely. But it wasn't the kind of loneliness that made her want to go down the dale every Saturday night like Mrs. Pickles from Far Town. No, it was her own folk about her she wanted. She'd be very content then.

As she pushed the importunate calves away from the now empty buckets, for the hundredth time she had a vision. A little lad it was. She heard the clatter of his tiny clogs round the house side; then he appeared, fresh-faced, grey-eyed, in tiny corduroys cut down from his dad's.

He stood poised there like a thrush, a bunch of wild harebells in one little fist. " Mam," he said, " can I have a drink o' milk? "

Fiercely Martha tugged down the clothes from the line, and by shaking her head tried to wipe out the picture. She sighed another deep sigh.

As she folded the clothes in the basket, her thoughts turned to her husband, away at market. She loved him dearly, and God knows he's a proper man, she thought, no one could doubt that, she least of all. But he didn't get children, and it wasn't her fault, she knew.

It was two years now since she'd gone to see that special doctor. She'd gone to a big town in Lancashire where she'd not be likely

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to meet anyone. If she had known beforehand what he would say, after he had explored her sweet body, she would never have gone. She retreated from the memory of it all.

That doctor had said as cool and as calm as you like, as though all that sort of thing didn't matter to folk, "There's no reason, Mrs. Reyther, why you shouldn't have as many healthy children as you wish. I should like to examine your husband and find out if the trouble lies with him. Can you get him to come and see me?"

That she could not. She tested the heat of the iron by spitting on it, and it sizzled sharply as though aware of her shame and indignation. She'd never even told Robert what she'd done, but let on she'd gone to buy a new best dress. She'd die sooner than let him know the truth.

Oh well, it was no use. What had to be, had to be. But sometimes it was hard to bear his careful avoidance of reproach. Robert wanted a son to carry on the farm. And there was the pretended sadness of all the other women. She began to iron with vigour and concentration.

It was when she went out for the heavy stuff which had been still wet at the hems, that the man at the gate spoke to her. He'd been there a few minutes, watching her stretch up to unpeg the sheets. He couldn't help waiting for the next movement of her arms so that he could see the way her breasts lifted, then sank into a round once more. He was hardly conscious that he was doing it. He was fully persuaded that he had trained himself not to look at women in that way.

He unlatched the gate as she turned to go in with an armful of linen, and said, "Excuse me," pleasantly.

Martha gave him a close look. Robert had taken both Nell and Rover with him or she would have had warning of a stranger long before this. A faint shade cleared from her face as she saw it was not one of the Indian pedlars who, with their fibre suitcases, had taken to wandering round the hill-farms. It was a hiker. A college lad, she guessed, in his tweed jacket and flannel trousers.

"Good morning," she called in her round, warm voice. "It's a grand day." Happen he wanted a pot of tea.

He followed her up to the house and stooped in at the door without being asked. She took a swift glance at his feet, thinking of her scrubbed stone floor, but his shoes were clean enough. He'd torn his trousers, though, and there was dried blood there too.

"Hast had an accident?" She looked at him with warm sympathy.

He was surprised at the beauty of her voice. These upland

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farm women usually addressed one in a voice that competed with fell winds or the braying of sheep.

" I slipped on the rocks on Werburgh Fell. Silly thing to do, but it's made me feel a bit queer."

He was North country, accenting his words heavily and seriously. She felt at home with him. He seemed a nice lad. She poured out a glass of sweet milk and got a basin of warm water and a bit of rag.

" See, I'll be going up the lane to feed the hens if you want to get your breeches off. It looks a right bad graze. I'll let you know when I'm back."

Decency having been arranged for, she took up a pail and went to the barn, shortly emerging and going down the garden to the gate into the lane. He turned in the windowseat and watched her. She was a trusting one. He might run off with anything. She had a mass of dark hair in a sort of crown on her head. Old-fashioned in a way, but it suited her. She moved well. Funny, she looked even at that distance as though the flesh on her shoulders would be warm and smooth to the touch.

He must hurry. He got out of his trousers, bathed the long oozing grazes, and then put on a pair of corduroy shorts which he unpacked from his rucksack.

She was a long time coming back, and he felt restless in the ancient house, warm and still except for an occasional fly buzzing madly through the window and the ticking of the clock on the wall.

He got up and went out into the sun and wandered along the flagged path that ran round the house. At the side there was a patch of grass, and then the rough moor came down within a few yards of the house—bracken and bilberries, stones and heather. He wandered about a little, idly and pleasantly, until he heard her call out as she reached the gate; then he returned slowly round the corner of the house to meet her as she came up the path.

She stood as though transfixed when she saw him, and set down the bucket of eggs she was carrying and made a curious little gesture with her hands thrown out before her. He thought it was because he had taken the liberty of wandering into the garden and he looked rather shyly at the bunch of harebells he had in his hand. They had come from the edge of the moor, not the garden, and he didn't think he need make any apology.

He followed her into the farmhouse. " Well, I'd best be going, thank you," he said. " Thank you for the drink and the hot water." He picked up his rucksack and began to draw up the cord and fasten the opening.

She hadn't spoken, but her colour had come back a little. She had moved round to the far side of the scrubbed kitchen table.

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The light in the low-ceilinged room flickered as the sun sifted through the mountain-ash outside.

He had grey eyes. Grey eyes and a fresh skin and harebells in his hand . . .

" I'm just going to set the dinner," she said. " You're welcome to stay."

He was going to say no immediately. Father Moore had said, " Never be alone with a woman if you can avoid it."

She turned to the fire and added before he could speak, " It gets lonesome up here. My husband's away at market and I shall see no one till past eleven at night." She lifted a lid on the hob and a delicious smell swam out into the room.

" It's only hotpot, but it's wholesome." She looked at him with an apologetic smile and her face was pleasant and homely, her eyes brown and bright, and her lips as red as a geranium.

He hadn't had much to eat for the last day or two. " Subdue the flesh," Father Moore had said.

" Well, thanks very much," he said with an equally shy smile, " I don't mind if I do." And he put his rucksack down on the floor.

Martha took a deep breath and felt her heart respond, beating strongly and warmly in her breast. She felt as though she had achieved some difficult task, and gathered herself for other tasks before her—she did not quite know what.

They spoke little. He sat in a rocking-chair with his feet tucked underneath and his hands linked at his waist, elbows braced back as he rocked in a limited way. Half drowsily, he watched her move about. The tortoiseshell cat came and sat near him in the windowseat and snored ecstatically as he plunged his hand in the warm fur.

There was not much to do but lay the table, and she took greater care over it than ordinarily. As she moved about, her heart beat so strongly that she thought he must hear it.

What is the matter with me? What's going to happen? What am I going to do? There seemed to be some strange cloud in her mind which wouldn't let her see things clearly. She was excited.

As he stood up to come to the table, he towered over her. She hardly noticed it. She was used to a big man in the house.

They sat opposite each other at the wide table. The meal was simple and tasty. They ate well and spoke little. They didn't need to speak. They were comfortable and understanding together. Every now and then they smiled at each other. Each covertly studied the other.

Martha, though outwardly calm, felt an inner excitement and urgency which coloured her cheeks and made her eyes shine.

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He's just a lad, she thought. Not more than twenty-three, I should say. He's not unlike Robert was when I first knew him. Has that same mouth; it has a sort of gentle look for a man.

He thought, This is good cheese. She's older than I am. It's difficult to say. She might be twenty-six. Or she might be thirty. She's nice-looking with those dark eyes. How smooth her skin looks, and brown. But it's really white—no, a sort of cream colour. And his eyes followed the gentle hollow in her round neck and would have gone further, but he dropped his lashes before the temptation.

Martha, looking across the table, saw where his eyes had rested, and a sudden stab of exultant joy ran through her. She got up quickly to hide her feelings and hurried into the little side kitchen. She stood for a moment pressing her thighs against the stone sink, staring unseeingly before her.

Again she asked herself, What am I doing? What is going to happen? But before she could form an answer or fix an idea in her mind, it slid away and she was left with an excitement, a grasping urgency.

Behind her in the kitchen the man said a short private grace and tried to bring himself back to remembrance of his future calling.

She felt him come into the small kitchen and ask mildly if he could help to wash up. She turned so that she bumped against him, but he moved politely out of the way. For a moment she was chilled. The companion of the dinner-table had gone. Here was someone who seemed almost elderly and superior in a way.

She began to talk as she washed the dishes, about anything, the poultry, the cat, the house. She must rouse him to some feeling, she must get back the comfort and the friendliness.

He was consciously determined by prayer and an effort of will, rigorously to ignore and exclude all feelings brought about by the physical proximity of women. After all, he had often done it successfully before.

Her warm, loving voice beat like a pulse in his blood. Inside him he felt as though a great vital spring of energy was being kept strongly in control by prayer and the power of his will. He exulted in the battle and the control. This is what the saints felt before temptation. Saint Augustine, let me follow thee in the struggle against sin.

Martha was struggling too now, battling against something unseen, something which was defeating her in her unformed purpose.

The tide of her excitement changed, a tinge of fierceness came into her. She no longer fluttered and fluctuated. Her feelings

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became more insistent and her actions more deliberate. She was some other being, and as she secretly wrenched open the top button of her dress in the little dark kitchen, her sense of shame spoke to her only in a weak distant voice, like an ailing child.

They sat in the warm porch drinking an after-dinner cup of strong, sweet brown tea. Martha basked in the sun, warm, vital, and wholesome as new bread. The man had withdrawn into the shade, sitting with legs crossed and arms linked and braced by hands round the elbows. He looked older, angular and taut.

The woman bent to play with the tortoiseshell cat, and the man saw her breasts like two smooth-shelled eggs resting in a dim warm nest. The blood sounded like a gong in his ears. He drew in his breath as though in pain and sprang to his feet.

She rose quickly with him, and at the look in his eyes a wave of cold swept through her. Her own eyes were tragic.

"Are you bound away so soon?" she asked.

He said curtly, "Yes."

Her mind struggled to maintain the promise of the situation but it slipped away from her.

He hoisted on his rucksack without looking at her. He was praying after a fashion, formulating rapid, incoherent phrases in his mind. Dear God, lover of mankind, help me, help me. Help me to do right. Help this woman, help us both.

She stood mutely there, the cat in silly ignorance of the situation rubbing against her leg for its own pleasure.

He gave his rucksack one last heft, his nailed shoes clinked on the stone flags. He gave her his shy smile. "Well, thank you very much," he said, "I'd better be getting along."

She watched him unlatch the little gate to the lane, and then he disappeared down the stony track towards the beck and the moor.

She felt strangely ill, as though part of her had been wrenched away. She turned from the door and slowly took the teacups into the kitchen. She washed them automatically, as though half asleep. She couldn't think what to do next. She felt dry and feverish and anguished. She must find something to do.

She wandered into the big kitchen and spread the chenille cloth on the table, carefully smoothing out the wrinkles in the accustomed way. She sat down in the rocking-chair, looking straight in front of her, a gaping emptiness in her mind like an internal wound.

With a thump of its paws, the cat jumped down from the rolled grey flannel trousers which lay on the windowseat, pulling them after her on to the floor.

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She bent from the rocking-chair and picked them up, and as she handled them she seemed to come alive. The tears flooded her eyes, her mouth twisted with a sob, and she flung the breeches on the fire with a furious gesture.

The tears poured down her face as she stumbled across the kitchen and up the dark stairs. In the dim, warm bedroom she tore off her clothes as if they were stifling her, rent them off and sank down, her body racked with sobs, shaking, agonising sobs. "Oh God, God, God!"

In the quiet afternoon warmth of the old house there was only the sound of grief and the clink of nailed shoes on the stone flags of the porch.

She didn't hear the sneck of the latch as he came stooping through the door. She had no knowledge that he was near her until she was lifted up and felt the warm spring of his lips urgently upon her mouth.

© James Leyland 1960

★ ★ ★

FRITTO MISTO

... Which is not fried mist, but an Italian mixed fricassée containing, if it's a good one, fungi and coxcombs; however, if your tastes are not so exotic, see if you can sort out the ingredients of our mixed dish. Solutions on page 143.

1. *A June bride is said to be lucky—but why?*
2. *When is the Fence Month?*
3. *What is a nine o'clock wind?*
4. *Ebor., Cantuar., Salop, Oxon—what are the more familiar names?*
5. *A tylopod is i. a builder's utensil; ii. animal with padded feet; iii. leguminous plant. Which?*
   Precatory means i. addicted to plunder; ii. holding a cathedral stall; iii. expressing entreaty. Which?
   Culm is i. coal dust; ii. stem of a plant; iii. geological stratum. Which?
6. *Who used the phrases a. "Peace with honour"; b. "Peace in our time"?*
7. *How many a. Champions of Christendom?*
   b. Articles of the Church of England?
   c. Chains in a furlong?
8. *Whose last words? "All my possessions for a moment of time."*

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TROUBLE WITH LOCKSMITHS

The Minister, armed with racing-glasses, watched the proceedings from his own rooftop

BY YOUNGMAN CARTER

"AN UNIDENTIFIED object," said the first voice on the phone, "is moving upstream to your area, George. Now reported at about two thousand feet, roughly over Purfleet. Know anything about it?"

"Not on my books that I know of," said the second voice. "What sort of object? A club Proctor off course? . . . Oh, I see, a helicopter. Registration? . . . No? Well, can you type it?"

"We think it's one of those little Skyhook runabouts, but the old visibility is not too good and there's a bit of river mist. She's wearing no lights. Over to you, in fact, George . . ."

Message from George to all concerned: Unknown helicopter moving up Thames River, Tower Bridge area. Report movement and identification forthwith . . .

George, at his official H.Q., commands the Thames basin from an eagle's perch. He is youngish, an ex-R.A.F. type, and very important as far as air traffic over the metropolitan area is concerned. The lift carries him within twenty steps of his O.P. penthouse, past the maps, the met. office, and the installations offices, but the last flight has to be climbed. He was slightly puffed on arrival, but in full control.

"Got her taped?" he asked the Duty Officer.

"Yessir," said the man in charge of the glass box on the roof. "A little Skyhook. Wandering about all over the place. Been down as low as 300 feet. Might almost be a drunk on a joyride, but she's being handled beautifully. You can just catch her now in the glasses. Mucking about over the Houses of Parliament. Having a lovely time, I'd say."

"Blimey," said George. "This means trouble . . ."

Message from the Faithful Commons, by telephone to George: What the devil is a helicopter doing buzzing the House when in session? Identify, remove, and report back . . .

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From George to the Faithful Commons: Helicopter shows no identification. R.A.F. engaged in Northern Exercise and not available for escort duties. Tracking aircraft from all observation posts. Helicopter now over St. Paul's and City area. Interference regretted . . .

" This is damnable," said George to his junior. " Trouble with a capital T. He must be drunk. Right now it looks to me as if the silly ass was wandering up and down Fleet Street."

" I make him to be over Bloomsbury, sir. Between us and London University—you see their tower. At about 250 feet. They move damn fast, these little Skyhooks. He must be mad as well as drunk."

" I have him precisely," said George, and groaned. " And stone the crows! The insolent stinker! The illegitimate son of the Nine Blind Ones! He's circling Security House. Now indeed we are for it in a big way. Hold the fort while I pull out every stop known to mankind."

Security House, officially referred to as Gabriel's Court, W.C.1, is the largest of the many modern triumphs, architecturally speaking, in the Bloomsbury area.

It has much of the charm of a glass-sided bootbox upended; containing four floors of income tax clerks, two of telephone accounts, six departments of the Agricultural (By-Products) Marketing Board, a cultural lecture centre and, on the very roof, the Security Penthouse, the secret heart of all that is Hush Hush in Government research. This has its own direct lift from the ground floor, with two personal guardians, both ex-Sergeant Majors of the Brigade of Guards. The single approach, a door resembling a safe, gives on to a series of inner doors covered by electric rays, bells, TV eyes, and the whole paraphernalia of absolute security.

It also possesses a magnificent roof garden, rustic seats, a box hedge—in boxes—the best view in London, and a sheer drop to the pavement.

On this particular Tuesday evening, it being long after Civil Service hours, there was nobody there except for the outer guard, Sergeant Major Dunsford, who possesses a minute bedsitter beside the top of the lift shaft, and Sergeant Major Grigg, D.C.M., who has an exact replica on the ground floor.

Both these worthies were officially alerted within minutes, but they were already aware of the impending menace, and were indeed discussing the matter on the intercom phone.

Dunsford, from his window just below and outside the great steel curtain, had a fair view. " He's all round us, Mr. Grigg—

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like a ruddy wasp. Better get the police. If he lands on that roof—"

"Can't you get to that roof nohow?"

"Not a hope in hell. Locks went on at six-thirty sharp. Control's at the Ministry and there's no one there, you can bet your sweet life . . ."

The Minister, however, if not in his office, was at least in the picture. Armed with his finest and heaviest racing-glasses, for he was a sportsman at heart, he was watching the proceedings from his own rooftop.

Furthermore, he was in direct communication by telephone with the Chief of the Metropolitan Police, and the Home Secretary who happened to be taking wine with him. "Looks as if he's coming in to land, Bertie," he said. "I say, what happens on that security roof—I mean, will it take the strain and all that?"

"Oh yes," said the Home Secretary. "It was built for the job, if you must know, five years ago. Never thought anyone would use it unofficially. The trouble is—"

"Yes?"

"The trouble is that the infernal fortress is so damned secure from below, that I bet every window in the place is open and probably the doors too. French windows, they are, on to the garden—remarkably pretty, I'm told."

To the telephone he said, "Running a cordon round it? Good. Can't we get a chaser plane on to him? . . . No? Well, if there's nothing nearer than Gatwick, you'd better get cracking. If he came upriver, he may go back that way. Get the river police—if we can't send a cruiser to the colonies let us at least send a launch to Wapping. Lay on everything: the coastguards, the C.D., the A.A., the whole damned bag of tricks. But get him . . ."

Said Sergeant Major Dunsford to Sergeant Major Grigg, "He's landed."

Said Grigg to Dunsford, "Can't you lean out of the window and take a pot at him?"

Said Dunsford to Grigg, "Not a hope in hell. He's right above my head—I'm unsighted for one thing. No gun, for another. And for a third—he's off again . . ."

Said the news editors of five London papers, "Make this a head across six, three-col. intro, and play it big. Security House raided. Spy menace? Aircraft sub in Thames mouth? Bring in outer space if you can. Go to it, boys . . ."

From a memo from the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to the Minister: Private and confidential. The aircraft which landed on the roof of Gabriel's Court at 8.17 p.m. on the 14th instant has now been identified as a Skyhook Mark 9

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Helicopter and is certainly of British origin. No examples of this type have been marketed abroad.

It seems probable that it is a machine which took off from Marling in Essex where two recently reconditioned aircraft, the property of Hedgehops Ltd., have been on test. Pending re-granting of licence and repainting, one of them wore no identification marks. It is established that the premises were entered on the night in question by a person unknown and an unauthorised flight was made. The machine was returned to a nearby field, undamaged. Visibility was poor, and this would suggest an experienced pilot with considerable local knowledge.

Evidence points to an ex-Air Force officer, Anthony Frobisher-Hawkins, 31, of Neatsfoot near Marling, but he has an alibi which seems unlikely to be broken. Investigation is proceeding.

With regard to Gabriel's Court and the security premises. It appears that only one room was entered, by an open window, and there is no trace of interference or damage. Any vital documents were under adequate cover. It is suggested that all P.R.O.s be instructed to play down the incident.

From Miss Anne Louise Worthingdown, 26, personal secretary to the Director of the Security Department, Gabriel's Court, to Anthony Frobisher-Hawkins:

Pig and Monster!

When I got to the office this morning I found forty policemen in my room asking damn silly questions, and one even had the impertinence to ask how come a red rose was lying on my blotter. I said I always left one there to remind me of civilisation. He said he believed me, so I am a better liar than I thought.

Pig, monster, and darling, I forgive you everything if you will promise never to do it again.

Anne

PS. Now it will be months before I dare to resign.

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TRUMPET CALL

They were watching and waiting—
he could feel their strange expectancy

BY G. E. FOX

"DAVID!" Gwyneth called. Her voice was tense. There was no longer laughter and excitement in it.

"Yes?" His answer echoed back down the slope of slate-grey rocks in the cave. Was she frightened of the darkness below? He had heard the note of fear in her voice.

"Shine the torch on me," she shouted. "I want you to look at me."

He shone the light down the wild scree up which he had scrambled with difficulty to see where the new, loose rock had come from. In the torchlight he saw Gwyneth's pale oval face, mysterious and detached from the darkness like a face in an old darkened picture. There was no fear, but her dark eyes held perplexity, and they were too bright, like stars in a wild sky.

"What is it, Gwyneth?"

There was silence for a moment, as if she was carefully thinking out some strange and momentous thing she had to say. He understood and yet wondered, holding the beam steady on her face. There was a tiny sound of slithering soil in the darkness and then only the vast silence of the mountain's dead and empty heart.

"David, don't think I'm silly, but tell me, am I the same—I mean, do I look the same?"

He laughed. "Why, yes. Still as pretty as the flowers on Mount Cadwaladr. Still my own Gwyneth. Why?"

"Because I feel different." Her voice was subdued and yet strangely confident.

"It's the darkness, and the sensation of being down in the depths of the earth," he called. "You feel cut off—apart from the rest of the world."

He didn't believe that, but it was something to say—to fend off the darkness that was beyond the light, and perhaps the terrors that her strange talk attempted to mask.

He hoped she wouldn't panic and beg him to take her out, for he was pleasantly excited by their little adventure into Cadwaladr's

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caves. There was mystery in the vast, dark emptiness, and uncanny possibility in the deep silence; and he knew, too, a delicious sense of protectiveness for Gwyneth, which in the bright light on the mountainside would vanish before her quiet independence of spirit and her indomitable Welsh pride.

"No!" she called. "It's not that—I feel like someone in a dream. As if this is my dream, and I am outside the mountain, asleep. And, David . . ." She paused.

"Yes?" he cried back, puzzled.

"David, you know how you feel in a dream? You know what is coming out of the darkness . . ."

So she *was* frightened.

"I'll come down, Gwyneth. We'll get out of this." He began to slide down the loose surface of the scree towards her.

"Wait," she called. "I'm coming up, David. I told you I wasn't frightened. I know I'm not dreaming, and I want to see what comes out of the darkness when I'm awake."

He heard her climbing the slope towards him, and he shone the torch along the loose slates and rock so that she could see her way. The little avalanche she disturbed echoed round the cave like a mountain torrent, the tiniest sound being magnified a hundredfold by the enclosing rock and the emptiness.

When she reached him she took his hand. He noticed hers was cool and steady.

"Shall we go on?" he asked.

He shone the torch upwards; its beam caused the shadows to fly about them like gigantic bats. The rock fall ended at a narrow crevice in the rock.

"There's a way through there, David," Gwyneth whispered.

"We'll see," he said, and, still holding Gwyneth's hand, he started to struggle upwards. The little avalanches began again, whisperingly at first, then rising to a rushing torrent of sound as they gathered momentum and size.

"Yes, I believe we've found a new cave," said David, examining the cleft in the rock when they reached it, "but it's not very wide. I couldn't squeeze through that."

"I could, David. Look! Give me the torch and let me try."

"Will you be all right?" he asked anxiously.

"If you mean am I afraid, the answer is no." She laughed. "It's the dream you know, David. I must see what's in the dark —waiting."

He couldn't understand her. He had the Celtic imagination, too—vivid, and sometimes terrifying; but he did not let it seek wantonly in the dark for the unknown. Then he realised that her courage was not physical at all. It was the greater courage

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that would and could dare the unknown—the unknown beyond the crevice in the rock.

When he came out of his reverie, he found she had taken the torch and was already squeezing her way into the crevice. It was too late to prevent her, for the light had disappeared and he heard her calling, "David, it's a big cave. I'll try to see the extent—"

Then her voice seemed to grow distant, as if she had suddenly gone over another horizon. In the cool darkness and silence he felt strangely alone. He wanted to hear the sound of her slim body struggling in the crevice again and to hear her laughter. It seemed as if she had gone for ever—on a terrifying pilgrimage into a dream.

"Gwyneth!" he shouted into the crevice. "Are you all right?"

Her voice came back, strangely muted and solemn—a sigh almost, along the narrow tunnel of rock.

"David, I'm scared."

"What have you found there, Gwyneth?" He was desperate in his anxiety for her.

"Nothing," her voice murmured. "Only a cave."

"Then why are you afraid? There *is* something. Tell me, Gwyneth."

"It's—it's what I said, David. I want to come out, but I want to know what is there in the dark, and I'm frightened all of a sudden. David, what shall I do?"

Her voice sounded piteous. He knew she was torn between fear and her desire to penetrate into the terrifying unknown. And yet what *was* there to fear? Was there really something beyond? He had heard of the Celtic burial-grounds in the caves of Cadwaladr. Had she found another cave beyond?

"What is down there?" he insisted. He heard her in the crevice, and then she was climbing swiftly back to him. Gently, he took the torch from her. For a moment she was dazed and silent, and then she told him.

"It's a big cave, David, and—and—it looks like a great hall. There's a sort of dais with a great hewn block of stone on it, like a crude altar—"

She paused, uncertain. He knew there was something else. He waited, and then she spoke hurriedly and breathlessly.

"Over the stone is a long black trumpet on a ledge."

"Gwyneth," he said excitedly, "why didn't you bring it out with you?"

Slowly and reluctantly she whispered, "David, it's the thing in the dark. I saw it—I don't want to touch it."

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"But, darling, the trumpet may be valuable. Perhaps thousands of years old. You *must* go back for it."

"No!" she said. "No, David."

"But it's only a trumpet, Gwyneth. What harm can it do?"

"I—I—don't know, but I have a feeling it's not to be touched."

She did not go on. Should he try to persuade her? Surely it was only the silence and the darkness that gave her such superstitious premonitions.

"All right, darling," he said to calm her. "Let's forget about it. Let somebody else find the trumpet."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. "Somebody else will find it . . . But should they?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, surprised at her inconsistency.

"Perhaps it's my dream and the thing in the dark is mine. It can't be somebody else's. No, David, I'll go for it," she said firmly.

"But, Gwyneth—"

"Of course I'm scared, David. I can't alter that. It's just that it is my own particular nightmare."

She slipped into the crevice again.

Ten minutes later she returned, panting a little and wide-eyed, as if she had seen the darkest corners of her dreams revealed. In her hands was a long black trumpet, shaped like an old coach horn; crude in workmanship but still retaining the elegance of something hand-fashioned with skill and care.

David flashed the torch, and in the tarnished bronze he saw dark, viridian gleams like sunlight on old green glass.

"How old is that, I wonder?" he murmured. He was fascinated by the thought of its incredible antiquity.

Gwyneth did not reply, and he saw her eyes fixed on the trumpet with awe, and perhaps with terror. Then the look vanished, and her face became inscrutable like that of a priestess who has learnt the secret of the oracle.

He took the trumpet carefully from her hands. It was heavy; and felt cold and damp and strangely malevolent. He could sense antagonism, for the Welsh are a race that have learnt by bitter experience to recognise the aura that rises from enmity, like marsh gas from a swamp. Even the air around the trumpet seemed cold and hostile.

"Let's go," he said. "It's cold in here."

"Yes," said Gwyneth mechanically. "It has grown cold now—cold as death."

"What do you mean, Gwyneth?" he muttered; but already she was sliding down the scree, and her figure in the torchlight

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was making long gesticulating shadows across the cave. He followed, holding the trumpet carefully to protect it from the loose stones and slate on the slope. The slithering stones clattered harshly, but beyond in the darkness he felt the brooding solemnity of something that seemed to wait, though it could only be silence waiting to return to its age-long tenancy of the cave.

On the mountainside the warm sunlight and the luminous sky dispelled some of his doubts, but neither he nor Gwyneth spoke until they were some distance away from the cave. Then the sparkling light on the bracken and on the silver birches brought back their laughter and delight in the day and in their love for each other.

Gaily he raised the trumpet to his lips. "I'll blow you a fanfare!" he laughed and, blowing with all his might, he brought forth a long wailing note from the bronze trumpet: so poignant and compelling a summons that he stopped in astonishment. Had *he* produced such a wild, plaintive sound merely by blowing into the ancient trumpet; or was that a human cry from far away—from the past of five thousand years ago?

"Gwyneth," he exclaimed. "Did you hear that strange cry? It is a voice—the voice of ancient Wales."

But she was staring in horror up Cadwaladr, her eyes wide, her lips parted in a sudden onrush of fear.

"Gwyneth, what is it?" he asked, following the direction of her gaze.

She did not speak, but her eyes flickered with a terrible understanding.

High up the mountain he could see the figure of a tall man, dark against the hillside. He shaded his eyes from the brightness of the sky, and saw the man was motionless and watchful. He was a thin man . . . thin to emaciation. Who was he?

"We must go. David! David!"

There was a note of hysteria in her voice. He turned sharply and saw her face was distorted.

Then she ran, flying almost, down the mountainside, scratching her arms as she scrabbled at the long heather when she fell in her haste.

He caught her at last, but she struggled to be free, to run wildly down the mountainside.

"You'll hurt yourself!" he panted, racing alongside. "Gwyneth darling, stop."

"No!" she screamed. "No!"

What caused this terror in her? The cave? The wailing note of the trumpet? The thin cry out of the past . . .

Could it be that?

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Suddenly she stopped her headlong flight and threw herself against him so that her face was buried in his shoulder, her arms tightly round him. He enfolded her in his and kissed the top of her head reassuringly.

"What is it, Gwyneth?" he whispered.

"I don't know, David! I don't know. It's all right now."

He looked down at her in perplexity. He could make nothing of her behaviour, and noticed that for all her sudden change of mood, she still glanced up apprehensively at Cadwaladr. As David held her in his arms, she seemed to shiver slightly as if the cold bronze had communicated some of its chill to her.

He took her home, then cut across the valley to his parents' house. Not wanting to talk about the caves and the trumpet and Gwyneth's strange terrors, he hid the trumpet in his bedroom and said nothing to his parents about it.

After supper he went up to his room and sat at the open window in the moonlight. It was one of those serene evenings with gentle sounds from far off—the rustle of leaves, the whisper of the distant river—and the mountain black against the moon which seemed to rest on its great shoulder like a lamp.

The ragged shape of the mountain was clear and sharp against the light, as if cut in blackened steel; and against the phosphorescent moonlit edge of Cadwaladr was the dark scarecrow silhouette of the thin watchful man of the afternoon. He was on the first lower slope before the mountain swept upwards to steeper heights; not far away, but too far for David to distinguish anything but the man's gauntness.

David was amazed and a little awed by such odd stubbornness. Why was the man waiting so long on Cadwaladr?

He felt his imagination was playing tricks. It must be a tree, or a trick of the light. Impatiently he turned away from the open window to examine the trumpet. He weighed it in his hands, examined its shape and the smooth, shallow pits that the long-dead craftsman had been unable to beat out. He rubbed gently at the green darkness of the bronze, then placed the mouthpiece to his lips, but did not blow.

He took the trumpet to the window and, resting it on the sill so that the horn was well out into the night, he blew softly. The same mournful note wailed out towards Cadwaladr and, beyond the rim of the trumpet's horn against the sky, he saw two men where there had been only one.

He blew again and produced a melody—a weird, beseeching melody. And at each note, another dark figure rose up on the mountain beside that first tall thin scarecrow of a man.

It was not possible! He put down the trumpet on his bed

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and stared at the moonlit edge of the mountain. Nothing moved. They were watching and waiting. He could feel their strange expectancy. What were they? Trees, shadows, imagination?

He undressed and went to bed, angry at having let his imagination run riot. One man cannot multiply into a crowd at the blowing of a horn. He slept badly, and though every nerve in his body was strung taut by his desire to watch from the window, his pride forbade him to do so, and he forced himself to lie in bed, tossing restlessly . . .

Next morning in the village street he met Gwyneth; her pallor and the look in her eyes worried him.

"Gwyneth! You seem scared to death."

"David, I am!" she burst out. "It's the trumpet, David. You must take it back."

He tried to protest, but she went on hurriedly, "There are more men on Cadwaladr with the man we saw yesterday. David, what are they?"

He remembered his own fears in the night, and he saw in her face such terrified appeal that he knew logic would only hurt and bewilder. He realised that here was something neither he nor she could explain.

"Wait here, Gwyneth. I'm going to fetch the trumpet. I'll be back in a few moments."

When he returned, she was staring wide-eyed up at Cadwaladr. He took her arm gently. "Come, darling, we'll ask Owen Gwynn-Jones. He will examine the trumpet."

She nodded absentmindedly, and together they set off for the ivy-covered cottage in which Owen Gwynn-Jones lived. Owen seemed so old that many believed he was over a hundred. He was renowned for his wisdom, and his knowledge of Wales and Welsh history. His sharp, bright eyes burnt with a fierce excitement when David showed him the trumpet.

"David boy, you have made a wonderful discovery. Let me examine it closely."

He took the trumpet in his wrinkled hands and turned it over and over as if he was looking for something. At last he pointed to faint engravings near the mouthpiece.

"That says, *Call and we come*, David," he said slowly.

David looked carefully at the marks. "Why, Mr. Gwynn-Jones, surely it's a picture—two pictures."

"Yes, that is how man first wrote—in pictures."

"This one," David said, placing a finger on marks nearest the mouthpiece, "seems to be a man blowing a horn." He moved his finger along the trumpet. "And this looks like men running."

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"What does it mean, Mr. Gwynn-Jones?" she whispered.

He looked at her carefully and his lips tightened. "It means what it says, Gwyneth child," he said seriously. "I think maybe you know."

"But I don't! I said to David in the cave that it was part of my dream. It was like that; all I wanted was to know what came out of the darkness."

"But you always *know* what comes out of the darkness, child. You yourself call it up into your dreams—or nightmares."

David looked from one to the other in astonishment. What were they talking about? He saw Gwyneth's face take on a strange look of understanding and resignation.

"Yes, I know," she said with infinite despair. "The men . . . or whatever they are . . . on Cadwaladr."

This was pure fantasy. He had forgotten his own night fears, and interrupted eagerly, "They're quarrymen from over Cadwaladr! That's it. Quarrymen."

To his bewilderment, they ignored him. It was as if he was no longer with them. Gwyneth and the old man stared at each other with such strange, absorbing apprehension in their eyes that David realised they had not even heard his words. Neither spoke.

"What is it?" he shouted angrily. "What makes you so solemn? Can't you say something? Gwyneth?"

Slowly, the old man turned to him. He had the look of someone breaking the news of death.

"David," he said sternly. "You must take back the trumpet."

"But why?"

"David boy, I don't know why. It is something within me and within Gwyneth here that says take it back. It's something beyond reason and logic."

"What do you mean?"

"Take it back, David! It has come out of the black night of the past—of the old barbarous days before Christianity, when evil had a powerful hold on man, giving him terrible knowledge."

"Of what?"

"Of life and death, David."

"I don't believe it!" With that, David raised the trumpet to his lips and blew the haunting melody that it had sounded the night before—blew it in anger and in derision.

"David!" screamed Gwyneth. She and Owen Gwynn-Jones crossed to the door and gazed up apprehensively at the shimmering, green mass of Mount Cadwaladr. And looking over their shoulders, he saw them—the silent, steadfast watchers on the mountain—a little crowd now, with a tall thin man in their midst.

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At the sight of Gwyneth's sorrowful, terrified face, David was ashamed. Why had he done that foolish, frightening thing? He knew his defiance was a sham. He was fighting the Celtic inner knowledge of strange things; and Gwyneth and Owen Gwynn-Jones, with subtle understanding, knew it could not be fought with defiance. " I'm sorry, Gwyneth," he muttered.

" I understand, David," said the old man gently. " Most men fight that way. A woman is different. Take the trumpet back, David . . . I can think of no other way."

" We'll go tomorrow. But Gwyneth will have to take it. I can't squeeze through the crevice. Let her get over this first."

" Don't delay, David," said the old man uncertainly.

" David's right," said Gwyneth. " I don't feel I could go now."

Owen Gwynn-Jones shook his head doubtfully. " Tomorrow is a long way off."

But Gwyneth smiled and said, " I must wait."

She said it so strangely and so dreamily that both men looked at her sharply. There was serenity in her face now, as if her fears had suddenly gone, and David laughed. Thank goodness, it was over! He would take the trumpet back, and all would be as before. And the men on Cadwaladr? Others in the village had seen them in broad daylight and said they were quarrymen from the other side of the mountain, idling their time away . . .

But that night, under the full moon, he saw them again on Cadwaladr, and he tried to convince himself they were quarrymen. " Why don't they come down to the village pub," he asked himself, " instead of standing about in the moonlight foolishly waiting and watching? " He felt he *must* know. He carefully counted the number of watchers on the mountain. He couldn't be quite sure, but he thought he could not be more than one or two out in his reckoning. There were twenty-seven.

Leaning out of his bedroom window, he blew the trumpet gently . . . seven, eight, nine notes of the mysterious call that seemed to be sealed up in the trumpet. He placed the trumpet on the window ledge and counted the shadows on the mountain.

Thirty-six!

Then he understood fully. He realised how that serene look on Gwyneth's face had deceived him. He knew he was seeing dark truths under all the light and knowledge of two thousand years. He saw the dark Wales of the long-dead past.

The trumpet must go back now. Gwyneth and he must face the terror on Cadwaladr and the nightmare within the caves. Dear God, he thought, must she go alone into that cave of death? And yet she *must*.

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He seized the trumpet and ran, leaping down the stairs like a maniac so that his mother shouted to him in consternation to ask where he was going. He had no time to answer. He ran so furiously along the street, that people turned to stare and call after him. Then he met Owen Gywnn-Jones running, too—as old men try to run, in jerky, marionette-like movements, his arms working incongruously, and with a terrible urgency.

"David, David!" he gasped in distress. "Gwyneth's gone. I was deceived by her sudden calmness. I know now! We must go to the caves."

"Those men on Cadwaladr? Who are they?" David almost screamed.

"I sent to the quarries to find out if they were their men. David, they are *not*! And the quarrymen have come over to help us to enlarge that crevice. I told them—begged their help."

"And those men? Are they—?"

He could not say it because of the horror of his new-found knowledge. And Gwyneth was now within the circle of that horror.

"They have left the mountain, David," said Owen solemnly.

"No! Oh no," he cried.

"I'm afraid so. The moon is full. It was when I realised that the moon was full that I ran . . . Old men shouldn't run, David. It is undignified, but I managed to reach the Morgans' cottage. She had gone."

"It's too late, then," he despaired.

"Not yet, David. The moon is not in its zenith, but we must hurry. The men are at the chapel, waiting. Bring the trumpet carefully—and hurry."

As they ran down the lane to the chapel, David said, "When I blew the trumpet, Owen, what did I do? Did I—?"

"Yes, David," gasped the old man. "You raised the ancient dead of the mountain . . . What black devilry sealed such power in a trumpet? What things we do not know!"

The men in rough clothing, standing by the chapel gate, all had tools of some sort—picks, shovels, crowbars. Torches and lamps were being tested and in their intermittent light David saw unsmiling, grim Welsh faces. The moon had four hours in which to climb above Cadwaladr's highest point. In silence, they moved off.

The crevice resisted all efforts to enlarge it. Time was winged, and the minutes flew as the men hacked and sweated, but only inches were gained from the stubborn rock. "It will have to be the dynamite," said the leader of the quarrymen.

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"You might seal up the cave. You can't do it!" yelled David, frantic at the thought of Gwyneth locked in the depths of the cave.

With redoubled effort, the men attacked a fault in the rock, and suddenly the roof and, indeed, all Cadwaladr seemed to heave and tremble above them, and showers of debris fell until the men had to run for their lives.

"Back," they yelled, "back! The roof is caving in."

But David and Owen saw that the crevice had widened, and together they stumbled through the dust and debris, their torches useless in the dust-impregnated air. David heard Owen's gasping injunctions to hurry ahead—he would follow. David, dragging the trumpet, blinded by dust, frantic in his haste, obeyed, until suddenly he was in something so vastly different, so unreal, so quiet and evil after the urgent shouting of men, the clatter of tools, the suffocating pall of dust, that he had to stop to control not hidden fear, but raging terror. It was only his love for Gwyneth that gave him the courage to stand firm; his whole instinct was to turn and run.

He was in a great cave lighted, it seemed, by the very fires of hell, for though the rocks glowed dully red there was no apparent source of light. He saw a great block of stone, like an altar, upon a dais of rough-hewn rock. Above, he saw the ledge on which Gwyneth had first found the bronze trumpet. There were stalagmites and stalactites—but the horror was in the unmoving figures within the cave. What were they? Rags and tatters of men, death in corroded bronze or dripping mould; and one, taller than the others on the dais, the very personification of Death in all his terrifying paraphernalia of shrouded wretchedness. And on the rough-hewn altar-stone, Gwyneth lay like one already dead.

David stood transfixed. At last the voice of reason, tiny and fragile within him, told him this was a burial-cave, and the mouldering skeletons round the walls could surely do no harm.

As he tried to buttress courage with commonsense so that he could advance into this hall of Death, the arms of the tall image at the altar-stone rose slowly. As if at this given signal, movement began all round him in slow and terrifying cadences of sound. A slow change began in the very rocks themselves.

His unbelieving eyes saw stalagmites sinking gradually into the floor and stalactites melting like icicles into the dimly luminous roof of the cave.

Time is turning back; time is turning back. The words revolved meaninglessly in his mind; his eyes watched the stalagmites and stalactites receding.

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Slow, deliberate movement spread to the tattered bones; the bones took on corrupted tissue; the corruption became flesh—flesh clothed in shining bronze and the skins of animals; rustle and movement became the murmur of men and the clink of weapons.

At the altar, the figure of Death was transformed into venerable old age: white-robed, with a crown of mistletoe. His hands were still raised, and those reaching hands stretched slowly towards the ledge on which the trumpet had once lain . . .

Was it the trumpet they sought? David held it—and he could not move in his nightmare of terror at this fearsome scene of the dead taking on flesh.

"David, David! Oh, merciful heaven, look! Look at Gwyneth!" Owen Gwynn-Jones was at his side, black-faced, horror-stricken.

He saw that she was no longer Gwyneth. Her eyes, wide with unspeakable horror, were dying; her face was dying in black hollows, and yet the last spark of life in her was fighting against the threat of death in the golden knife in the hand of the mistletoe-garlanded figure above her.

The knife was what the raised hands had sought, not the trumpet. The trumpet's work was done—the dead had been recalled. But Gwyneth—the sacrifice—was going back to them. As the golden knife remained poised above her, she put on death and corruption as they had put on flesh and life. And David was powerless, utterly powerless.

Then Owen's voice rang out in clear, pure Welsh, beautiful, solemn like organ music. "Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live . . ."

It was as if something had stopped suddenly in the cave—like a great clock. There was the uneasy silence: the quiet at the centre of a cyclone, a momentary peace between one tumult and another. What was happening? The burning eyes under the mistletoe garland took on hate, but the golden knife still shone. And yet, were not the bronze shield and helmet dulled? Was there not bitter contention in the air, as if . . .?

"In the midst of life we are in death . . ."

With rising exultation, he saw the eyes of the dead glaze in their sockets, bronze turn to green, and the mistletoe wreath fade and shrivel. Imperceptibly, stalagmites and stalactites grew again; slow inches recording centuries that had passed.

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust—" Owen's voice intoned the sad and beautiful words. Again flesh put on corruption, and ancient bones amid rags and tatters littered the floor of the cavern.

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" I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, ' Write. From henceforth blessed are the dead . . . for they rest from their labours.' "

David ran across the cave and gathered Gwyneth in his arms—Gwyneth, living, breathing, gazing up at him in wonder.

" Quick, David," Owen called urgently from the crevice. " The cleft in the rock fault has loosened the strata above. The mountain is collapsing on us! " They ran madly across the burial-cave, illuminated now only by Owen's torch.

Yet David had one more thing to do. Shielding Gwyneth with his arm, he turned back to hurl the trumpet far into the cavern towards the dais. For a moment they paused. Was that the sound of a long deep sigh—not of one man, but of many? He could not be certain. He heard the gathering fall of stones and a deep, rumbling moan behind him in the rock.

" Hurry! " screamed Owen from the crevice. " David! Gwyneth! Come out! "

On Cadwaladr they heard the mountain's requiem to those ancient men who had risen at a trumpet's call—the deep organ notes of the mountain's slow subsidence upon their burial-cave.

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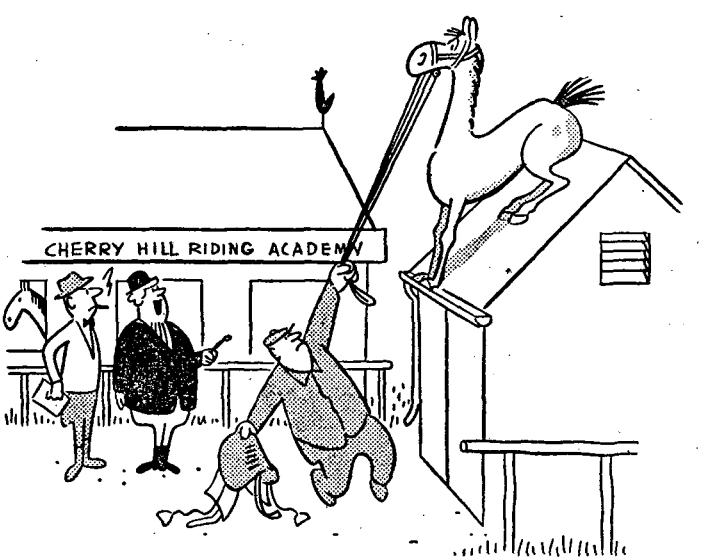

" He remembers me."

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Honi soit qui mal y pense . . .

Thou sha't have Ribbands, Roses, Rings,
Gloves, Garters, Stockings, Shooes, and Strings
Of winning Colours, that shall move
Others to Lust, but me to Love.
These (nay) and more, thine own shal be,
If thou wilt love and live with me.

ROBERT HERRICK, *To Phillis*

" Never have I seen any one so slim and elegant, so delicate and pretty! " the Shirt-collar said. " May I ask your name? "

" That I never give! " the Garter answered.

" Where do you live? " the Shirt-collar then asked.

But the Garter was too modest to answer such a question . . .

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, *The Shirt-Collar*

Bold Assertion

Why blush, dear girl, pray tell me why?
You need not, I can prove it;
For though your garter met my eye,
My thoughts were far above it.

ANON, *On Seeing a Lady's Garter*

Highly Peculiar

So much is said about the good taste Frenchwomen have in dress that I am rather astonished to hear that the ladies in Paris are now wearing white stockings, and even with black dresses, which they hold high enough to display their peculiar taste. I trust it may be long before Englishwomen follow this ugly and unbecoming fashion.

The Lady, Volume I, 19 *February,* 1885

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Hoist with her own Petard?

I know a lass who wears a purple garter,
She wears it in the springtime,
And in the month of May,
And if you ask her
Why in the world she wears it—
She wears it for a Sapper who is far, far away.
Far away,
Far away,
She wears it for a Sapper who is far, far away.

ANON

The French Have a Word for it

One day at a ball Edward III picked up a lady's garter. Someone laughed rudely, but Edward turned to him and said, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," which is French and means "Evil be to him who evil thinks." "Soon," he added, "you shall see this garter set so high that you will think it an honour to wear it." And so when he founded a new order of knighthood he made it the Order of the Garter, and to this day great men are proud to wear it.

H. E. MARSHALL, *Our Island Story*

In Varicose Vein

So Mary got me into bed, and cover'd me up warm:
However, she stole away my garters, that I might do myself no harm.

JONATHAN SWIFT, *Mrs. Frances Harris's Petition*, 1699

Hot Cross Garters

MALVOLIO: Sad, lady! I could be sad: this does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering; but what of that? If it please the eye of one, it is with me.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Twelfth Night*

Leg Break

I saw on sale in London recently a GARTER, bedecked with red ribbon and pink net, and right in the middle of a large rosette was a miniature of singer Elvis Presley.

The whole effort was called a leg bracelet.

Letter in Modern Woman, April 1960

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Habeas Corpus

A captain bold from Halifax who dwelt in country quarters,
Betrayed a maid who hanged herself one morning in her Garters.
His wicked conscience smited him, he lost his Stomach daily,
And took to drinking Ratafia while thinking of Miss Bailey.

One night betimes he went to bed, for he had caught a Fever;
Says he, " I am a handsome man, but I'm a gay Deceiver."
His candle just at twelve o'clock began to burn quite palely,
A ghost stepped up to his bedside and said, " Behold Miss Bailey!"

" Dear Corpse! " said he, " since you and I accounts must once for all close
There really is a one pound note in my regimental small-clothes;
I'll bribe the sexton for your grave." The ghost then vanished gaily,
Crying, " Bless you, Wicked Captain Smith, Remember poor Miss Bailey."

ANON

Magna Garter

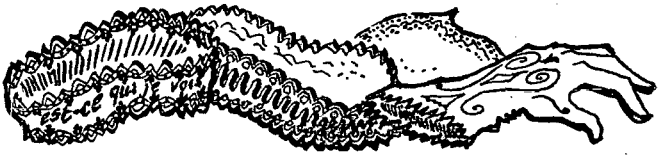
Edward III had very good manners. One day at a royal dance he noticed some men-about-court mocking a lady whose garter had come off, whereupon to put her at her ease he stopped the dance and made the memorable epitaph: " Honi soit qui mal y pense " (" Honey, your silk stocking's hanging down ") and having replaced the garter with a romantic gesture gave the ill-mannered courtiers the Order of the Bath. (This was an extreme form of torture in the Middle Ages.)

W. C. SELLAR *and* R. J. YEATMAN,
1066 *and All That*

In My Trophy-Room Right Now . . .

There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves,
And all the trophies of his former loves.

ALEXANDER POPE, *The Rape of the Lock*



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CURRENT AFFAIRS

The oven was set to switch on automatically at sunset

BY NICHOLAS DEE

"GOING to bed with you," remarked Captain Waterhouse aggrievedly, "is self-defeating, like examining an icicle by candlelight."

"I'm sorry," said Anthea. "I shipped with you under a misapprehension. I didn't realise your supercargo was also expected to bed with you, or do I mean bunk with you? I suppose that is the nautical equivalent of Fly with me."

"Will you stop looking at your watch?"

"I was wondering if the tuna were beginning to rise."

"Not for half an hour. You can put it back under the pillow." Reverting to his former grievance, he said, "In that case, why did you ship with me?"

"I saw a headline in a newspaper," she said pensively, shifting her supple torso to the left in order to get the captain's beard out of her ear.

"What was it?"

"*Mother of Five Passes G.C.E.* That is a public examination," she explained. "It went on to relate how the forty-seven-year-old mother of a family had, by going to evening classes, achieved this feat."

"Well?"

"I felt that a civilisation in which the bearing and rearing of children was accepted as such a stultifying process that a minor mental exploit of this kind from a mother was considered worthy of headlines could be no place for me. I decided that Western marriage was a trap which I would avoid."

"Bravo," said Captain Waterhouse with enthusiasm. "So tell me, what was your plan in coming to the South Pacific? I am prepared to advise you; I will even help you—judiciously."

"Your advice may come too late."

"Oh, surely not. Good advice is never inopportune. Will you *stop* looking at your watch? Karani will call us when the tuna rise. It is really most distracting of you; it keeps making me think of the Jin of Aratu."

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"Who was he?"

"Is, not was. He is one of my customers. You will be meeting him by and by; I call there after the Solomons. With this wind we should get to Aratu in, let me see—" Captain Waterhouse paused for calculation, tracing a course absent-mindedly on his passenger's thorax—"about three weeks."

"Why do I remind you of him?"

"He is particularly fond of clockwork and mechanical devices. He reads a lot, too, like you. This time I am taking him an electric-lighting plant, the complete works of C. P. Snow, and some Restoration drama on gramophone records. One of the first consignments I left with him included an alarm clock and the works of Sterne, particularly *Tristram Shandy*; on my last visit the Jin told me that he had adapted an English habit from that book and always—"

"Always what?" inquired Anthea, for the captain seemed to have come to a halt.

"I find it embarrassing to tell you."

"I really cannot imagine why."

"Well," he continued, blushing slightly, "the Jin likes to time his domestic amusements by the alarm clock."

"I see."

At this moment Karani called that the tuna were beginning to rise. Anthea twisted herself into a sarong—her own clothes had been lost in a fishing accident, but luckily Captain Waterhouse seemed to have a plentiful supply of sarongs on board—and ran up the companionway. The rest of the conversation was deferred until a later occasion.

"What was your profession before you decided to shed the shackles of civilisation?" Captain Waterhouse asked her that evening.

"I was an electrical engineer."

"Is that so?" he said, pleased. "I have never encountered a female electrical engineer before. And it is a most fortunate coincidence because you can help me with the electrical plant for the Jin."

"The one who has the alarm clock?"

"Just so; he will be able to electrify it now. It will be most useful to have you there, as none of my crew are competent to help with the installation, and there is a rather elaborate thermostatically-controlled cooker with a time-switch. I was afraid I would have to stay a fortnight, which might have been complicated."

The complication—though Captain Waterhouse did not mention this—consisted of a previous passage between him and the

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Jinnia of Aratu, a somewhat overbearing black-haired onyx-eyed beauty, descended from a long line of witch-doctors, who at this moment was planning to poison her husband and thumb a lift in Waterhouse's ship to the next island, six hundred miles off, ruled by a dear cousin of hers whom she hoped to stir up to bloody invasion.

They reached Aratu on schedule. Like their other ports of call it was an emerald-green, coconutted finger of land, trailing a dazzling white switch of coral reef in the immensity of the Pacific.

Captain Waterhouse was not au fait with the Jinnia's plans, and so he was delighted to see her again.

"Hullo, Tuala my dear! Pretty as ever," he said, giving her a bristly kiss and folding a box containing some elegant black nylon corsetry into her arms. "You take off your wreath and try those on for size."

The Jin watched the presentation impassively.

Soon, discovering that his royal customer was striking up an intellectual friendship with Anthea, Waterhouse resumed his erstwhile relationship with the Jinnia, and suggested, on the sixth day of their visit, when the electric plant was in satisfactory working order and paid for, that he should take out Tuala for a day's fishing.

Anthea was paid for too: Captain Waterhouse had sold her to the Jin for six sacks of pearls, though of this fact she was as yet unaware. Being an obliging girl, however—and considerably taken with the Jin, seven-foot-six of handsome, gold-skinned, black-bearded potentate—she was quite willing to suspend her occupation of oiling the plant and type a short note for him.

Although he could read a number of European languages with facility, the Jin had never mastered the more laborious art of writing.

The note was accordingly typed and placed among Tuala's fishing-tackle which appeared to consist of an excessive number of sarongs and some twenty yards of shell necklacing. Here in due course Tuala found it.

The embarkation had been held up by the last-minute disappearance of Kichi, Tuala's three-month-old son. The Jin had reasonably pointed out that she did not need to take him on a fishing trip, and in the end she had had to abandon him.

"He'll turn up," said Captain Waterhouse. "Children always do."

He sighed.

Kichi's disappearance was accounted for in the note:—

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My dear Tuala, in order to ensure that you return punctually from your fishing trip I have placed your baby in the electric oven, which is, as you may know, set to switch itself on automatically at sunset. Kichi will suffer no inconvenience in the meantime, as the oven is ventilated. How wonderful these Western ideas are!

By the way, I wish you could make your efforts to poison me a little more subtle; I am afraid the cook is beginning to suspect. It is fatal when servants become aware of tension between their employers; his baking has fallen off shockingly.

Tuala was naturally very annoyed when she read this, as they were already halfway to the next island. Her green eyes darted to the sun. It was low on the horizon.

" We must go back! " she screamed to Waterhouse. " We must get to Aratu by sunset! "

" Oh, come, come, my dear," he said, " three hundred miles? Don't talk such nonsense."

" Kichi is in the oven! "

" Well, I'm afraid he'll be overcooked by now, poor little soul. You should have taken him out before you left. Come and play snakes and ladders."

The enraged mother snatched up a fish-trident and stabbed him. Above its handle protruding from his midriff, Captain Waterhouse's affronted eyes saw her run to a prahu and launch it over the side, but he was too late to see the forty-foot shark which terminated her trip home.

This accident was perhaps as well for Anthea, since one of Tuala's first acts on returning would have been to marinate her husband's new purchase in salted oil.

As dusk fell the Jin of Aratu strolled round to his engine-shed to inquire why the electric light had failed to come on in his chandelier.

He looked with approving admiration at his electrical technician, who had the gift of wearing a sarong with tremendous chic, and who was not all cluttered with feathers and frescoes over the more distracting parts of her exterior like so many of his female subjects.

She was reading Huxley by candlelight.

" I've come to ask you to do something more for me," he said agreeably. " But first, why no light? "

" I took the precaution of cutting off the fuel supply. Just until the baby was removed from the oven."

" I had rather thought of leaving it there."

" I don't approve of long pig," said Anthea, going back to her book. " You've been listening to too much Restoration drama."

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" Oh, very well." And he gave orders for the child's removal, but added, " I could have your head chopped off for opposing me, you know."

" But then who would deal with your short-circuits? ". Anthea pulled a switch, and garlands of light flashed from every palm tree.

The Jin saw the force of her argument. Thoughtfully he nibbled the lobe of her ear. " For your sake, my dear, I could almost find it in me to become a vegetarian."

" What was it you wanted me to do for you? " the accommodating girl presently asked.

" Oh that. My ex-wife Tuala—I'm sure she did it out of pure spite—has gone off with my alarm clock, which is going to upset all my habits. I wondered if you could make me another? "

" I daresay it could be managed," said Anthea reflectively. " A wiring system connected to the Palace gong, perhaps . . . I'll start at once."

" Oh, not at once, my love," objected the Jin, leading her in a purposeful manner out of the stuffy engine-shed and towards the Palace. " Tomorrow will be time enough. For tonight I think I can manage without."

Some time later that evening Anthea remarked irrelevantly, " What do you think of competitive examinations for women? "

And her new master replied with considerable enthusiasm, " I think they are a magnificent idea. We will institute them on Aratu at once, and you, my dear queen, shall instruct the candidates."

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CAT WALK

BY JOHN SALT

AUGUST rain in Howland Street blackened the dusty pavements and pasted the day's paper and ice-cream wrappings flat along the gutters. The tall West Indian weaved along the centre of the road with the raw, red wounds on his face plain to see in the lamplight, and collapsed into the arms of a frightened passer-by at the junction with Tottenham Court Road.

Detective-Sergeant Jack Manbre, reporting the incident to his Divisional Inspector half an hour later at Holborn Central police station, was shaken by the violence of Edward Rosewarne's reaction.

"Face wounds?" Rosewarne said urgently. "What kind—bottle, razor, dusters?"

Manbre shook his head.

"Well dammit, man, where is he now?"

"Charing Cross Hospital."

Rosewarne lunged for the telephone, tapped his fingers impatiently on the desk while the connection was made, then barked, "Casualty? . . . This is a police call. Inspector Rosewarne speaking. You have a man there, West Indian, badly-lacerated face . . . What's that? . . . Oh Lord! Well, is the constable still there? . . . Put him on, will you?"

The blistering lasted a full minute. Then Rosewarne slammed down the receiver and said belligerently to Manbre, "That should keep him on his toes in future."

Manbre nodded tactfully.

"He's gone, of course. The doctor cleaned him up and

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slapped plasters on his face. Then he gave our bright copper the slip and departed whence he came."

"No name?"

The Inspector said grudgingly, "He did get that, from a letter in the fellow's coat. It's Baldwin Braddifer, address in Cleveland Street, a shop of some kind."

"That's near where we found him."

"I know. I've sent our man round there, but he'll get no joy tonight. Braddifer won't chance the district for a while. That's been the form so far."

"That kind of thing is hardly new, sir," Manbre said mildly. "What makes this one so exciting?"

Rosewarne plucked a paper from his desk. "You'd better read this," he said shortly.

Manbre took the blue tearsheet. It was a report from the river police on the body of an unidentified African recovered from the water in Limehouse Reach. He read it through, then glanced at the Inspector. "Murder?"

"That's the surgeon's view, and I wouldn't quarrel with expert evidence."

"He could have been injured in the water, caught up by something."

Rosewarne shook his head. "My ten bob is on the sawbones."

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" Well, anyway, it's not our pidgin. Unless there's a connection."

Rosewarne stood up and took back the paper. " I have an uncomfortable feeling that there is," he said slowly. " This fellow in the river was carved about in the same way that Braddifer seems to have been. For what it's worth, I've had a dozen reports from three different divisions of similar woundings. And all of it hearsay—we've never talked to one of the victims. That's why I got so hot under the collar about Braddifer."

Manbre asked suddenly, " All West Indians? "

" All coloured people, anyway. Which gives us somewhere to look. We'll make a start with Braddifer. Meantime, I'm going off duty before something else keeps me up all night."

Rosewarne clumped downstairs to the charge-room. The duty sergeant was sitting at his lectern, staring determinedly over the top of his spectacles at a little girl perched on the edge of a wooden bench, dipping for fried potato chips in a greasy paper bag. A woman police constable was drying the child's long fair hair with a towel.

The sergeant said heavily, " Now, for the last time, what's your name? The sooner you tell us that and where you live, the sooner the constable can take you home."

" She ain't no copper," said the child with ineffable scorn. " She's just a judy dressed up."

The sergeant said patiently, " That's enough lip. Now be a good girl and tell me where you live."

" Bucknam Palace," the child said promptly. She licked the last crumbs from her fingers and screwed up the empty bag. " You might 'ave put a bit of skate in with me sixpennorth," she complained. " I reckon you're a mean lot."

Edward Rosewarne liked children and he liked this one. He went over and took the crumpled bag from her. The face she turned up to him was a perfect oval, framed in fine and fragile bone. Dark violet smudges of tiredness showed beneath green-flecked grey eyes that looked out on the world of policemen with a deep and ancient caution.

" You'll make yourself ill eating those things at this time of night," he warned her.

She jerked her head away from the ministrations of the policewoman and answered him with spirit. " I can eat thirteen ice lollies after me dinner and no trouble."

Rosewarne said gravely, " I'm going to take you home."

She eyed him a moment, then gave him her hand and stood up. " Come on, mate," she said, " I'll take you."

" Is it far? "

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"Just round the corner. I'd have been there now, if this lot hadn't pinched me." She began to drag Rosewarne towards the door.

"Hang on a minute," he protested. "We'll have a coat round you first. And we'd better have your name, too. Just for the record—you know how these things are."

"All right, then," she said importantly. "It's Muriel Russell. You can call me Mew."

Rosewarne took the old tweed jacket which the policewoman brought him and wrapped it carefully round Mew's shoulders. "How far do you say it is?"

"Couple of minutes."

"All right. Not worth wasting the nation's petrol on that. I'll walk you there."

The two minutes lengthened to ten, and by now Mew was perched high on Rosewarne's shoulders as he marched to her direction down alleys and backstreets between Drury Lane and Charing Cross Road.

The child's hands pressed down hard on his head, ramming his hat over his ears, and her disembodied voice chirped away into the starless night. He learnt that her father and mother were dead, that she lived with her Auntie Joan, and that she had spent the evening in a cinema.

"Who gave you the money? Your auntie?"

She giggled and fell silent.

Rosewarne said quietly, "I think you went round to a side exit, waited till somebody came out, and then slipped in behind them before they could close the door."

Mew asked in an awed voice, "How did you know?"

Rosewarne chuckled. "I used to do it myself when I was a kid."

"You won't tell?"

"I think we'd better tell auntie. You know, for that record we're keeping."

"All right," reluctantly. "You aren't like a copper, are you?"

Rosewarne smiled bleakly at the night. "None of us are when you get to know us. How far now?"

"Just up there on the left. Do you like cats?"

Disconcerted, Rosewarne replied gruffly, "Not much. Why?"

"I do," the child said contentedly. "Specially big ones. That's mostly why they call me Mew. Listen to this." She let out a piercing caterwaul that stopped Rosewarne dead in his tracks.

"Stop that noise," he commanded severely, "or you'll walk the rest of the way."

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She began to beat him fiercely about the head and to scream, " You're a pig, a big pig."

Rosewarne set her down firmly and was preparing to deliver reproving words, when an angry woman bore swiftly down on him. " What are you doing with that child? Let her go—do you hear me?—or I'll call the police."

Rosewarne took a long slow look at the pale, angry face surmounted by an aureole of red hair. " I think you might have called the police a little earlier, miss."

She glared at him. " What do you mean? Who are you? "

He told her patiently, and added a few words concerning the care of small children. To his discomfiture, she began to weep, and he saw that she was hardly more than a child herself—eighteen or nineteen at most. He said more gently, " Didn't you know she was out? "

She shook her head. " I'm at work all day. Mew puts herself to bed and I go up to see her when I come in. Tonight I was kept late and I made a meal first, meaning to go upstairs later on." She gestured helplessly. " I fell asleep in the chair and didn't wake up until gone ten. That's when I found her bed was empty. I've been going mad, looking for her."

" You could get help, you know. Mew could go somewhere and be looked after."

The girl pulled Mew fiercely to her. " We can manage," she said. " I'm looking after Mew; I told my brother I would and I'm going to do it by myself."

Rosewarne gazed at her reflectively.

" All right," he said. " But she mustn't go wandering at this time of night again." He bent down to the child. " You hear that, Mew? You find some big cats to play with and stay out of trouble." He smiled at Joan Russell. " You've heard how much Mew likes cats, of course."

She jerked her head up and stared at him hard. " No, I don't know anything about cats."

" But Mew told me—"

" No, it's nothing. She tells stories; people shouldn't listen. Come along, Mew. Thank you, Inspector, for bringing her home. Good night."

He stood watching them hurry through the doorway of a tall smoke-blackened brick tenement across the street, and remained a full minute longer wondering just why the simple mention of cats should have frightened Joan Russell in quite the way it did.

Rosewarne's telephone bell rang next morning, as it always did, just in the middle of breakfast. Manbre's voice told him that

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Braddifer had returned home. "It's a cooked-meat shop in Cleveland Street."

"There in half an hour," Rosewarne told him hurriedly, and hung up.

The shop in Cleveland Street was a tiny box set three steps down from street level and into which daylight barely crept. A broad oak counter piled high with biscuit tins, boxes, and canned goods took up most of the available space; and behind it, solemnly sharpening a thin ham knife, stood quite the largest negro Rosewarne had ever seen.

The man finished whetting the knife and tried its edges along the ball of an immense thumb. Then he laid the knife down, point towards the visitors, and smiled hugely. "Come on in, man," he invited, in the musical voice of Barbados. "The natives is friendly."

Rosewarne tilted his head back and stared hard at the coloured man, looking in vain for signs of injury. "Name of Braddifer?" he inquired.

The negro jerked his thumb in the direction of a door. "He a sick man today, not talking to anybody."

"Can we see him?"

The giant smiled peacefully. "Not without an invite, man."

"What's your name?"

"Maximilian."

"And then what?"

"Jes' Maximilian, man. Seems like it was too good a name to spoil by latching anything else on to the hind end. And just so you know, nobody calls me Max. It's Maximilian or, bless you kind sir, git out of my road."

"We are police officers," Rosewarne said tersely.

Maximilian allowed himself the faintest flicker of interest. "Just looking and asking," he suggested softly. "No peeking in the linen closet?"

"We have no warrant, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I meant," he agreed. "Wait while I see if the man's receiving." He turned with some difficulty in the narrow space and went through the door at the back of the shop.

"Cheeky swab!" said Manbre.

Rosewarne grunted.

Maximilian reappeared and lifted the counter flap, beckoning them through. The back room was larger than the shop, but not much. There was a small window in the rear wall, but the main light came from a ceiling strip hanging from uneven chains. Braddifer sat at a table, peering into a mirror propped against a green polythene bowl. He was bare to the waist, and plaster

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strapping covered the whole left side of his face, neck, and shoulder. Fresh bandages lay beside him on the table.

Rosewarne introduced himself and stood waiting.

Braddifer turned his head slowly and looked at him. "I got nothing to say, man," he stated listlessly.

The Inspector said warmly, "Don't talk nonsense. You should be in hospital. How did you get into such a state?"

The wounded man turned back to the mirror. "I was in a little accident. Ain't no law against that."

Rosewarne felt his tide of impatience rising. His glance encountered the beaming gaze of Maximilian. "You aren't talking either, I suppose," he said pointedly.

Maximilian smoothed the palms of his hands against his thighs. "Baldwin had the accident, not me," he answered politely.

Rosewarne looked at the two coloured men with something approaching despair. The situation was hardly new to him: terrorised people rarely talked. But this was something different again, a barrier of race, of strangers in a strange land taking refuge among their own kind and with nothing to say to the foreign landlord. Doggedly he tried again.

"You were attacked last night, Braddifer. You weren't the first, and you won't be the last if you refuse to tell me what happened. Come along now, you've nothing to fear."

Braddifer turned cold, dead eyes on him. Rosewarne sighed and followed Maximilian back into the shop. Manbre lingered a moment longer, watching Braddifer peel the plaster from his face. The outer edge of a long wound came into view. Manbre stiffened and stared in disbelief. Braddifer's eyes met his. Swiftly, the coloured man clapped the plaster back on his cheek and held it there. Manbre moistened his lips, made to speak, then turned swiftly and followed the Inspector.

Maximilian had gone back to his knife-sharpening. Rosewarne said sharply, "You're a fool not to talk if you know something."

The big man smiled engagingly. "I'm a lot of things, Mr. Policeman, but I'm not a fool. Seems like my friend got into bad company; you can't blame him if he don't want to talk about it."

"And you steer clear of bad company?"

"Bad company just naturally steers clear of me. I'm big, you see."

"Not too big," Rosewarne cautioned. He turned to go.

At that moment the doorbell bounced and jangled on its spring and Mew Russell rushed in, followed more sedately by her aunt. The child perched herself on the counter and rattled away about her adventure of the previous night.

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Rosewarne saw that she and Maximilian were old friends, and he was surprised at the look of pleasure on the big man's face as Mew pulled and tugged at him. Finally Maximilian raised his right hand in a mock-threatening gesture. "You hush up now, dolly girl," he warned, "or I'll flatten you like a fly in a biscuit."

Mew squealed with delight and hurled herself at Rosewarne, begging for rescue. The Inspector, retrieving his dignity as best he might, bade both girls a firm good-bye and left the shop.

Outside in the street, he gave Manbre a sharp look. "I got the impression you were trying to hurry me out of there. Did you get something from Braddifer?"

"Don't think I'm round the bend, sir," Manbre said hurriedly, "but did you ever hear of an African sect called the panthermen?"

Rosewarne thought for a moment. "I think so, yes. Semi-religious cult of some kind. The priests dressed in panther skins and clubbed their victims with a weapon studded with the claws. Why, what's the connection?"

Manbre gulped. "The connection is that I saw Braddifer's wounds; and if they weren't made by claws of some kind, I'm a case for the psychiatric ward."

Rosewarne stopped dead. "You're sure of that?"

Manbre nodded. "I saw a fellow clawed up once in a circus. You can't mistake wounds like that." He paused a moment, then said helplessly, "I don't get it. What's it all about?"

Rosewarne walked on, smiling his bleakest smile. "I know what it's about. What I don't know is how or who."

Manbre frowned at the pavement. Suddenly he whistled. "Protection?"

"I think so, yes. In a narrow and well-defined area among small shopkeepers and traders—in this case the West Indian community. They won't talk, of course; you saw that. But now and again somebody pleads hard up and won't pay. Then the cat walks."

"A real one?"

Rosewarne shrugged. "That's a figure of speech. But whatever it is, animal or human, this cat kills—and I'll have no maneaters in my manor."

"What do we do now?"

"I can't detach every point constable for special duty, which is what I'd like to do. So there is only one thing left."

"Wait and see which way the cat jumps?"

"You put it so well," Edward Rosewarne replied coldly.

The cat jumped again at three o'clock on the following morning—a shattered clock face proved the hour. Rosewarne and Manbre were on the scene by eight. The place was a lock-up

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tailoring factory, and most of the damage was confined to the basement sewing shop where the bulk of the cloth was also stored. Bolts of worsted, hopsack, and Italian linings had been wrenched down from their shelves and now lay twisted and tumbled among the shattered remains of a steam presser and a sewing-machine. Both had been savaged with a sledge-hammer, and the cloth itself was rent and torn as if some great clawed animal had worried at it.

A bald little man hurried forward, gesticulating wildly. Deep lines of worry creased the pasty flesh on each side of his mouth. His eyes were wide and scared.

" Inspector, what is this? " he gabbled. " Police in my shop? I run a respectable business, I have never been in trouble, why are you here?."

Rosewarne said pacifically, " Take a look around you, Mr. Koslov; that's why I am here."

The fat man's eyes flickered from left to right, he clenched his podgy hands tightly together—Manbre saw the knuckles gleam white. " I did not ask you to come. I make no charges, you hear me; I make no charges."

Rosewarne picked up a length of the cloth and thrust it at the tailor. " You've had a visit from a cat, Mr. Koslov. A large one, by the look of it."

The tailor stood transfixed. His arms dropped to his sides and he stared at the shredded cloth. " Some hooligans," he mumbled, " vandals from the backstreets who wish to do me injury."

" No cats? " Rosewarne prodded again.

The fat man raised his eyes with the fear still in them. " I don't know what you mean," he said simply.

Rosewarne dropped the cloth. " I think you do, Mr. Koslov. But since you obviously don't intend to tell me about it, I'll leave you and your staff to clear up the mess. There will be a police guard on the place for the next few days."

Koslov said hurriedly, " I don't want that, no guard."

" Very well, I can't insist. But if you are in danger—"

The tailor's voice was high, hysterical. " I am in no danger, I tell you—" He stopped short and stared past Rosewarne. The Inspector turned round.

In the doorway stood a very tall, thin coloured man dressed in a black suit of old-fashioned cut. He wore a stiff high collar with a black string tie, and there was about him a clerical air, heightened by the little book bound in limp black leather which he carried beneath one arm.

His face was long and hairless, his nose thin and beaked, his jaw cleft and chisel-sharp. His upper lip was a straight and narrow

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line but the lower was damp and pendulous and of a bright and unnatural red. His hair was white, but not through age, and the sunshine streaming through the doorway gave him a terrible halo completely at variance with the atmosphere of evil which his tall and ungainly figure in some way projected.

Koslov swallowed audibly, then forced himself to speak. "I'll be with you in a moment, Mr. Effra."

The tall stranger nodded and came forward into the shop. He spoke in a clear bell-like voice. "I find you in trouble, Mr. Koslov, and with company too."

"I didn't ask them to come, Mr. Effra," Koslov gabbled. "It was the burglar alarm; they were here when I arrived. As for trouble—" his voice broke and he dashed the back of his hand against his eyes as a child might do—"it is nothing, a small thing."

Effra said, "I am distressed for you, Mr. Koslov. Are you then quite out of business?"

"No, no, not at all," Koslov said frantically. "Already you see my girls are tidying up; soon they will be back at work. The machines I can soon replace."

"I am glad," said Effra. "Yes, you must soon get back to work." He turned to Rosewarne. "Don't you agree, Inspector? We must all work hard and earn our livings—regrettable perhaps, but there it is."

Rosewarne ignored the question and asked one of his own. "Have you any ideas about this, Mr. Effra?"

Effra regarded him with polite insolence. "Why should I, Inspector? It is not my business to inquire too deeply into my neighbours' doings. So different from your own views, I have no doubt." He turned back to the tailor.

"You won't forget, will you, Mr. Koslov—back to work as soon as you can. I regard my order as top priority. Good day to you, and to you, Inspector. I have no time to stay. There are so many backs to clothe and mouths to feed."

He walked deliberately to the door. Koslov watched him through it, then expelled breath on a long sigh.

Rosewarne asked sharply, "An important customer?"

The tailor nodded. "He runs several agencies for waiters and domestics. I make all the clothes for them—alpaca jackets, overalls, tunics, that sort of thing."

"Where does he live?"

Koslov said fearfully, "Why do you want to know? He is my best customer; I cannot afford to offend him."

"I'll bet," Rosewarne said. "Sergeant, get Effra's full name and address. Mr. Koslov, I shall want a statement from you

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when you are straightened out here. Step round to Holborn Central at your own convenience."

He climbed the steps to street level and walked along to Langham Street. Manbre joined him on the corner.

"What do you make of this one, sir?"

The Inspector shrugged. "Persecution of minority races, that wouldn't be new. But this I think is different. Got that address?" Manbre handed him his notebook. "Garnet Effra, that's a hell of a name to go to bed with! This is interesting, though. See where he lives?"

Manbre nodded. "I noticed that, too; just a few doors away from Mew. This one really hangs together, doesn't it?"

"I hadn't noticed," Rosewarne said shortly. "Look, Jack, I'd like another talk with Maximilian."

"The shop is just round the corner here."

Rosewarne shook his head. "No. This time I think we'll have Maximilian come to see us. Lay it on for this afternoon."

Manbre nodded, then said carefully, "Are you starting to get an idea about this case. I mean, do you think—?"

Edward Rosewarne looked at him severely and said, "At this stage I don't think at all, I only think I think."

At four that afternoon Rosewarne sat in his office with Maximilian facing him across the desk. He began carefully. "Any idea why I asked you here? You didn't have to come; I hope they made that plain."

Maximilian grinned. "Cain't nobody make me do anything I don't want, Mr. Rosewarne."

Rosewarne grunted and tried another tack. "How's Braddifer?"

A shadow chased briefly across Maximilian's face. "Not good," he admitted. "He's back in hospital now."

"You're keeping shop?"

"Maybe. Depends how I feel in the morning."

Rosewarne said firmly, "If you take over that shop, Maximilian, sooner or later you'll be asked the same question that Braddifer was asked. How are you going to answer?"

Maxmilian said softly, "That would depend a whole lot on what the question is. You haven't told me yet."

"You know too damned well. 'Pay up or shut up. If you don't the cat will get you.'"

"You talk a lot about cats, Mr. Rosewarne."

Rosewarne leaned across the desk and spoke with sudden exasperation. "I'm telling you now in simple terms that I know there is a protection syndicate being operated in this district,

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and that the shopkeepers who won't pay get beaten up—clawed up is a better term. That's true, isn't it?"

Maximilian stopped smiling, his face set rock-hard. "Yeah," he said. "It's true."

"So you're going to keep shop and hear the question?"

"Could be."

"All right. Will you tell me when it happens?"

The big man sat back and folded his arms calmly. "You've been straight with me, Mr. Rosewarne, and that's something from a jumble. So I'll be straight with you. The answer is no. I won't help you because I'm on my own. I'll answer the question the way I choose. And I'll handle the cats the way I choose, because I'm big and I don't scare easy."

Rosewarne sighed. "On your own head, then. But I'll tell you this. I'm going to get this beauty."

Maximilian stood up and moved to the door. "Maybe yes, maybe no," he said. "What makes you so sure?"

"I'll tell you. This morning I met a vain and cruel man who has always had it his own way. His name is Garnet Effra. Mean anything to you?"

Maximilian said carelessly, "Sure thing; owns a lot of property round here. Little Mew and her aunt live in one of his houses."

Rosewarne said softly, "You could save me a lot of trouble just by saying the right words."

Maximilian gave his wide, world-loving grin. "Man, I done more chinning with you than I does in a month of wet Sundays. I got a shop to keep; see you another time, Mr. Rosewarne." The door closed firmly behind him.

Rosewarne buzzed for Manbre. "What's new, Jack?"

The sergeant shook his head. "Not much. I've got two men watching Effra. Nothing there so far. He's got an agency in Wells Street, the business is legitimate."

Rosewarne said heavily, "What else? Has he any followers?"

The sergeant brightened. "There is that. He's got about six regulars, all pretty bent; they've been on our books at various times."

"What about Braddifer's shop?"

"Peaceful as you like. I've left a man there, though."

"Good," said Rosewarne. "Now listen here, Jack. Try to get a line on Effra's past. I want to know what he did before he settled here." He picked up his hat.

Manbre looked glum. "Pretty thankless job."

"So is pounding a beat," Rosewarne told him unkindly. "I'm going out for a walk. Have something for me by the time I get back."

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Rosewarne's walk took him first of all to Howland Street, the scene of the attack on Braddifer, and from there in profound thought to Soho Square. It was there that he came across Mew Russell, neat and tidy in a blue print dress and with her fair hair bound up bizarrely in an attempt at the winged kerchief that West Indian women wear.

Rosewarne grinned at the evidence of Maximilian's handiwork, and reached out a hand to the brown paper parcel which the child held clasped beneath her arm. "What have you got there?" he asked her.

Mew pushed it at him eagerly. "Careful now when you unwrap it," she warned. "It's glass."

Rosewarne pulled the paper away gently, then stood in wonder at the beauty of the thing he held in his hand. It was a bottle of clear glass, faintly green, and inside it a four-masted barque with sky-sails set canting her starboard counter high over a breasting sea. Her lean hull was of smooth ivory with upperworks and bowsprit picked out in gold, and her long raked masts rose sheer through snowy sail and filigree cordage. She raced with a bone in her teeth through a tide rip between twin headlands; around her played coral dolphins and flying fish, and at her prow a golden-haired nereid aimed her gaze for the horizon and blue water.

"Maximilian gave you this?"

The child nodded sunnily. "He made it for me. It took three months, every night after the shop closed."

"You spend a lot of time with him?"

"We're mates." And then she added loftily, "'Course, when I got something else to do, he has to put up with it."

Rosewarne nodded. Suddenly he had seen the attraction the little girl and Maximilian had for each other. Both were independent, needing and asking no help from anybody.

"You know, this is a very beautiful thing," Rosewarne said, and was conscious of the inadequacy of the words. He wrapped the bottle again carefully and gave it back to her. "Does Maximilian talk to you much?"

"All the time," Mew said airily, and fell into step beside him. "He tells me about the boats he's sailed in, and how to fish with a spear, and about a lake all filled with tar stuff that never empties, no matter how much you take out of it. And he told me about duppies, too."

Rosewarne said absently, "Duppies, now; what are they? Animals of some sort?"

"Animals," she jeered. "Duppies are spirits, soft. And you got to be careful how you pass the burial grounds late at night or

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they'll come after you and sit on the end of the bed all night, and after that never leave you till you're one too."

"Sounds pretty strong stuff for a little girl."

"I don't know," Mew said judiciously. "What about some of them fairy tales?"

Rosewarne remembered the brothers Grimm somewhat guiltily and changed the subject. "What else does he tell you, Mew?"

"Oh no, you don't," the child said alarmingly. "You've started being a copper again."

Rosewarne grinned at her. "All right, Mew, no more questions like that."

"I should think not," she said huffily, and walked on in silence. But words would have their way with her. "Only one thing about Maximilian though—he don't like cats. Nor does Joanie these days, gone right off them she has; can't mention them in the house."

"Too bad," said Rosewarne. "How long has it been like that?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "Dunno." She fell silent again. Then she said inconsequently, "My friend used to train them."

Rosewarne slowed his pace abruptly, a familiar tingle ran up his spine to the base of his neck. He said carefully, "What friend is this—Maximilian?"

"'Course not. A bloke who lives near me. He says he has thirty-six cats; not that I think he's really got that many. I mean—you never see them. Only the milk and the meat," she ended on a thoughtful note.

"And he used to train them," Rosewarne persisted gently.

She looked at him earnestly. "Yes—big ones, he told me. Lions and tigers, like in circuses."

Rosewarne said urgently, "Who is this man, Mew? Is it Mr. Effra?"

"Can't stop," she yelled suddenly. "There's me auntie. I'm late home; won't half catch it. Bye!" She was off up the road with the kerchief slipping askew and her heavy fair hair tumbling over her shoulders, but with the precious bottle tightly clutched beneath one arm.

Rosewarne hurried after her and reached the house just as the door closed. He rapped on it sharply. After a few moments the door opened again.

Joan Russell looked out at him, red-faced and angry. "You ought to be ashamed," she snapped, "questioning a kid like that," and banged the door shut again.

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Rosewarne walked back up the street. On the corner a big black car drew into the kerb. Rosewarne recognised the driver at once and filed the fact for further useful reference. He stood still while Effra climbed out. The man moved awkwardly, and Rosewarne noticed that his right leg jutted stiffly from the door so that he had to lever with both hands on the door pillars to get out.

The driver gave Rosewarne a hunted look, then shot the car away from the kerb and out into the main street. Effra turned to face Rosewarne. "Good evening, Inspector," he said. "What brings you to my part of the world?"

"A friend," Rosewarne replied laconically.

"A friend," Effra repeated in his clear musical voice. "One should always have friends."

"Just so. I take it your driver is a friend of yours as well?"

Effra's face tightened. "No doubt you know him," he said in a half whisper. "A convicted felon. I am well aware of that, but one must have charity and mercy. The man is completely honest now. Or at least he has shown himself to be so far."

"What if he slips?"

"If he slips—" Effra's mouth writhed into a smile that was no smile at all. "In that case, Inspector, I should have no mercy at all." He gave a half bow and walked towards his house, the limp no longer so evident.

Rosewarne turned into the station at a little after seven and asked the desk sergeant for Manbre.

"Not in yet, sir. I haven't seen him since I came on duty at four."

"All quiet meanwhile?"

The sergeant took up a sheet of paper from his desk and peered at it doubtfully through his spectacles. "Affray in Cleveland Street, half an hour back, sir."

Rosewarne said quickly, "Cleveland Street; near Braddifer's shop?"

"Inside it, sir. An all-coloured job. Couple of blokes with their eyes in slings, one with a busted arm."

"Pick anybody up?"

The sergeant shook his head. "Too late. A neighbour reported the incident, but by the time we got there it was all quiet. We interviewed the man in charge, name of Maximilian. Seems he was attacked in the shop by three men and clobbered the lot. I must say I'm on his side."

"Me, too," Rosewarne said warmly.

The sergeant had known Rosewarne a long time and recognised

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a good mood when he saw one. He leaned forward over the high desk and said confidentially, " Are we on to something in Cleveland Street, sir? "

Rosewarne grinned. " Yes, Sergeant. I think we are. Specifically, I think somebody asked a question and got no for an answer."

Rosewarne went up to his office and sat down at his desk. Quite suddenly Edward Rosewarne began to worry. It was a familiar feeling which began with a vague discomfort and speedily built up into a weight of dread. He sat glaring at the telephone, willing it to ring.

The city clocks chimed eight, then nine. At half past the telephone rang. Rosewarne snatched it from the cradle and heard Joan Russell's voice. She sounded distraught, and with her first words Rosewarne isolated the hidden cause of his dread. " It's Mew," the girl said. " I can't find her."

Rosewarne stabbed a finger at his intercom, then rapped into the phone, " How long since you saw her? "

" Three hours, maybe longer. She went to play in the street. When I went out to call her in, she had gone."

" What did you do then? "

" I hunted all round the neighbourhood, then I tried the shop."

" Well? "

The girl's voice broke. " There was nobody there, it was all closed up. Oh, Inspector, what shall I do? "

" Keep your head," Rosewarne told her. " Go home and wait. I'll be with you soon. One more thing, Miss Russell. Did she have the bottle with her? "

" The bottle? Oh yes. Does that matter? "

" Somebody might have noticed it. Off you go, fast as you can." He slammed the phone down and shouted into the intercom, " Get me a car, fast. Send a man right away to the Russell house—there's a child missing. Tell him to get a full description of what she was wearing, then alert all Metropolitan stations. I want a street-by-street search of the area. Use every available man. And for the lord's sake put some life into it."

He reached Mew's home ten minutes later. " There'll be a plainclothes man here in a couple of minutes," he told Joan brusquely. " Tell him all you know, no matter how unimportant it seems."

The girl faced him, her face white and taut. " Inspector, where can she be at this time of night? "

Rosewarne shook his head and said more gently, " I don't know. Now you come and sit down for a minute." He led her to a chair by the empty fireplace. Joan Russell collapsed into it and

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covered her face with her hands. He gave her a moment to recover, then said quietly, " Joan, tell me what you know about a protection racket in which obedience is enforced by the threat of a cat."

" Nothing," she said distractedly. " That really is true, Inspector. I've heard stories like everybody else, and I saw poor Mr. Braddifer when he came home. But it was none of my business and—"

" And people like you don't believe in telling stories to the police," Rosewarne finished for her quietly. " Did Mew know about this? "

She said hopelessly, " Who can tell about children?" Then suddenly realisation hit her; she started to her feet and shrieked, " No, oh no! "

" I hope you are right," Rosewarne said gravely. " I think my man is here now. Don't be frightened. I'll try and get back to see you again this evening."

Rosewarne passed the detective-constable in the hall and cannoned into Manbre in the street outside. " Where the hell have you been? " he hailed him savagely.

" Chasing you for the last hour," Manbre said. " Here, take a look at this." He handed Rosewarne a small leaflet with a portrait of an animal trainer printed in badly-registered colour.

Rosewarne took it over to a street lamp. " This is our man? "

" I think so, yes. Called himself the Great Ondega in those days."

" Can you identify him as Effra? "

Manbre hesitated. " I think so. He was born in British Guiana in 1911—that's about the right age. He worked with circuses in the States, then bought a mangy string of his own and toured it through the West Indies. He had a few profitable side-lines as well—one of them earned him two spells in prison."

" Charges? "

" Money with menaces. Grievous bodily harm."

" Anything else? "

" Just this. Ondega was badly mauled in Jamaica. It left him with a stiff leg, and he wasn't nippy enough to chance it in a cage with the cats after that."

Rosewarne whistled. " I'll take a chance on it. Effra's our man, let's go and see him." He set off up the street at a run.

Manbre caught up with him at the house. " What will you say to him? " he inquired breathlessly. " You haven't an atom of proof."

" I'll speak as the spirit moves me," Rosewarne promised grimly, and began to beat on the door of the darkened house.

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"Hullo, somebody's been breaking milk bottles," Manbre said. "There's glass all over the steps."

Rosewarne knelt swiftly. "Strike a match, Jack; I can't see a damned thing." The vesta flared and the two men saw lying among the shards of greenish glass the broken brittle fragments of a model ship carved from ivory. Rosewarne hurled himself at the door.

"The child is in here," he yelled. "Come on, break the blasted thing in."

The door gave with a rush. Inside, they searched the building swiftly, but found nothing. Then Manbre ran a hand along the wainscot of the stairs. "What's this?"

Rosewarne grunted, "Cellar door, come on."

They arrived together at the foot of the stairs. Rosewarne found a hanging-light switch and turned it on. Manbre held his nose in disgust. "Place smells like a zoo."

"It was a zoo," Rosewarne said grimly. "Look there."

At the far end of the cellar a staple and ring had been driven into the bricks. Around it lay tattered sacking and several large and well-gnawed meat bones.

Manbre stared dully at the debris on the floor; his stomach heaved slowly and water flooded his mouth. He took a deep breath and clutched at the wall to steady himself. When he spoke, his voice was wondering, horrified, like that of a small boy.

"My God! How horrible. He kept a real cat down here after all."

Rosewarne's face was drawn with anger, his eyes hard and without mercy. "A real cat," he murmured. "And now it has walked. I wonder where in blazes to." He pulled himself together. "Come on, Jack, we're wasting time down here."

The two men raced up the stairs and out of the house.

The radio car was still parked outside Mew's home. Rosewarne climbed in, unhooked the microphone, and talked to Holborn Central. "Additional to the search for Muriel Russell. Maintain the hunt in the London area but alert Home Counties constabularies. Now, listen to this. She may be with a West Indian called Garnet Effra—Manbre will read you a description. He has an office in Wells Street, but he won't be there, though you'll probably find some papers that will help. Meanwhile I'm going to Great Titchfield Street. Relay any fresh developments."

He settled back in the rear seat. Manbre said questioningly, "Titchfield Street?"

Rosewarne nodded. "It's just a thought. I want to see how late tailors work."

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Koslov greeted them agitatedly, his fat little hands flapping back and forth. " What is it now, Inspector? " he demanded. " Why do you badger me? "

Rosewarne put his hand against the tailor's chest and pushed him gently down into a chair.

" Mr. Koslov," he said, " the last time we met I was prepared to help you, but you wouldn't help me. Tonight you *are* going to help me or I'll know the reason why. A little girl has been kidnapped and I believe her to be in considerable danger."

Sweat poured down Koslov's face. " A little girl? What can this have to do with me? "

Rosewarne thrust his face forward, jaw jutting. " Just this, Mr. Koslov. Where do they take the men to see the cat? "

Koslov shuddered, his thin voice rose to a shriek. " Already you start this cat talk. How should I know? What business is it of mine? "

Rosewarne suddenly shouted, " Koslov, I am not playing. Tell me where the cat lives, or I'll see it's the worse for you."

Koslov's lips trembled, his eyes misted. " I—I cannot—" he began to mumble.

" Not to save a child? " Rosewarne persisted inexorably.

Koslov shook his head violently. " You do not know what it is to live the way I do," he stuttered. " One says this, the other says that. And all the time they shout and they threaten. It is too much." His voice trembled on the verge of tears.

" Manbre," Rosewarne said sharply.

The sergeant stepped forward, his body instinct with menace.

The little tailor shrank back, then said simply, " It is enough, I will tell. But not because you, Inspector, shout at me, or because your man doubles his big fists. I will tell you because I have small children of my own who perhaps think their father a great man, even though he is only a faint-hearted tailor."

He turned to Rosewarne. " You will need a car, Inspector. It is a long way, down by the river near a place called Rainham in Essex. You turn off along a rutted meadow track through a white gate. There is water on each side, and across the river there is a large factory with a red sign on top. I cannot tell you more than that."

Rosewarne turned without a word and walked to the door. As they crossed the pavement he said to Manbre, " The longer I spend in this job, the more I realise how little I know about human beings."

Manbre nodded. " The poor bloke thought I was going to hit him," he said glumly.

Rosewarne wrenched the car door open. " Here's where you

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show your mapmanship, driver. Take me to Rainham, Essex, fast as you like." To the radio operator he said, " Get me Purfleet Division, Essex Constabulary."

As the car sped eastwards, Rosewarne relayed his directions to his opposite number in Purfleet. Ten minutes later they were passing through Wanstead and the Essex man had confirmed the location. Rosewarne thanked him and warned, " Don't move in, this is my pidgin. But pick your best shot and give him a rifle. Be with you in half an hour."

The big car slid through sleeping Ilford and Goodmayes, swung with screaming tyres at the Dagenham intersection and tore downriver along the arterial road at eighty until flashing lights proclaimed the roadblock.

Rosewarne's car pulled in beside three more at the side of the road. The Purfleet Superintendent shook Rosewarne's hand.

" We're all set here, Inspector," he said. " That's your track over there." He jerked a thumb towards a white five-barred gate set in the hedge. " The arterial is blocked either way, but I take it your birds are already in the nest. What do you want us to do? "

" I'll take half a dozen of your men, including the marksman," Rosewarne told him. " Pass the word for everyone to keep their heads low; it could be a shooting party. How far is the house? "

" Half a mile, almost on the river bank. It's derelict, you know."

" It's occupied tonight," Rosewarne said. " All right, let's go."

The police party split into two groups, each one following the banks of the flood ditches on either side of the track. A faint mist marked the Thames; ahead the red neon sign of the factory dyed the skyline.

The house showed no lights, but emerged from the night as a darker bulk. Just by the broken-down garden gate a single pinpoint of red light glimmered fitfully as the guard drew on his cigarette.

Manbre crept up close, then put out a hand and tapped the man on the shoulder. " Evening, Soapy," he said pleasantly.

The rat-faced man whom Rosewarne had last seen driving Effra's car gasped, " Blimey, rozzers! " and tried to twist from under Manbre's hand. But the sergeant held him firmly.

" Keep your hair on, Soapy," he advised. " There's no place to run."

Rosewarne crossed the garden swiftly and silently. He had reached the door when Mew screamed. He cursed and kicked the door open.

Inside, the smell of cat was strong. From somewhere below he

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heard the child's continued sobbing. Manbre came up beside him and together they pushed on through the darkness.

Another door gave upon a long corridor lit by a window let into the thickness of the wall. Rosewarne pushed close to it and looked down.

The floor of the cellar was about ten feet below. Directly opposite in the farther wall was a stout wooden door, and above that another window aperture. One end of the cellar was a blank wall, but in the other was the grilled entrance to a tunnel. As they watched, the wooden door opened and Maximilian was pushed in at gunpoint by two men. The coloured man was in shoes and trousers; his bright checked shirt hung in ribbons about his shoulders and his face was bruised and bleeding.

The two men pushed Maximilian against the blank wall, then left the cellar. Manbre whispered, " How did he get here? "

Rosewarne hissed back, " Mew was the decoy, poor kid. Effra knew he had only to pinch her to make Maximilian take a trip out here. How the dickens can we get round the other side? "

Manbre gripped him suddenly. " Good God, look at that! "

The grille at the far end had opened. Something grey came bounding through and halted, snarling, in the centre of the floor. Rosewarne stared incredulously at the lean, reptilian head, the great paws, heavy tail, and massive hindquarters. " What is it, a puma? "

" Wild cat of some kind," Manbre answered. " Look up there, opposite—Effra and Mew at the window."

Rosewarne glared across. Effra had forced the little girl up against the glass and was holding her so that she could not turn her head away. At that moment Effra saw the police. He stared for only a second in mixed amazement and fear, then vanished from view, leaving the child to beat her hands against the glass as she stared down at the helpless Maximilian.

The West Indian stood a few paces from the wall, arms held outward and bent, knees very slightly flexed, eyes fixed on the cat.

The puma restlessly quartered the floor, tail swishing from side to side. Three times it made a feinting run at Maximilian, and each time at the last moment turned away. Rosewarne saw sweat streaming down the man's cheeks, but no sign of fear in his face.

The puma retreated almost to the tunnel entrance and arched its back, flexing its forepaws until the muzzle came down to the floor. Maximilian's head came down too in the manner of a diver. Steadfastly he watched the cat.

The puma straightened its back and moved to a corner of the cellar, swiftly turned and came to the centre of the floor in a diagonally loping run. Then the powerful hindquarters gathered

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for the leap, and the great cat soared through the air at Maximilian's head.

The next movement was pure sleight of hand. It seemed to Rosewarne and Manbre that the West Indian dived beneath the cat and caught it by one hind leg, swinging it with his great strength in a giant arc which deflected the killer from its course and dashed it against the blind wall.

The wooden door was kicked open from outside and Maximilian dashed through it just as the puma rolled over in a corner and gathered itself for a second leap.

Rosewarne, glancing upwards, was in time to see a blue-serged arm draw Mew away. He sighed and wiped his forehead. "I hope to God somebody pinched Effra," he said to Manbre.

The sergeant said excitedly, "Look at that cat now."

The puma hurled itself twice at the door, scoring great grooves in the woodwork, then turned and dashed straight back into the tunnel. "Come on, Jack, the show's over. Time to pick up the pieces," said Rosewarne.

He led the way along the corridor. The Essex men had five of Effra's followers lined up on one side of the room. Maximilian sat on the floor with Mew in his arms, softly crooning to her.

Rosewarne said sharply, "Where's Effra?"

The Superintendent said worriedly, "He's out on the marshes, and that damn cat is loose too. It will save the law a job if we don't look sharp."

"Get a couple of cars here quick," Rosewarne shouted. "We'll pick him up with the searchlights. He has a game leg, so he can't get far."

Two police cars lurched and bumped their way along the grass track, headlights blazing over the misty marshes. Somewhere near at hand the hunting cat howled. Rosewarne felt his back hairs rise. A constable shouted, "Over there, sir, on the stack."

Rosewarne narrowed his eyes. A hundred yards away, a figure showed black in the searchlight's flare on the top of a low haystack, and below it a grey shape bobbed as the cat jumped for its prey. "Where's your marksman then?" Rosewarne yelled.

A young constable stepped forward and aimed an Army .303. The rifle spoke twice, but still the grey shape bobbed in and out of the searchlight beam.

A deep musical voice spoke out of the darkness. "If the cat don't get him, man, you will. Give me the gun."

Maximilian stepped forward and took the rifle. "You got to get in there, man. You got to get in real close."

He set off over the sour tussocky grass, his feet picking their way softly and silently, his great body gleaming in the white light.

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He halved the distance between the house and the stack.

Then the watching police saw him halt, heard his mocking challenge, "Hey! Pussy, come and get yo' dinner." A grey arrow shot towards him, and the rifle spoke. The cat turned in the air with a bullet in its brain. Maximilian called again. "And now, Mr. Effra, you come and get yours."

The figure on the haystack slid down and tottered towards the West Indian. Rosewarne went forward and stepped swiftly between the two men. Maximilian grinned. "You figured I was fixing to shoot him too, didn't you, Mr. Rosewarne? But don't you worry. I'm a self-respecting feller. Got to keep the law and pay my taxes."

Two of the Essex men came up and took Effra by the arms. Rosewarne looked at the muddy, scarecrow figure which still retained its strange and dreadful aura and hardened his heart.

He stepped forward and repeated the words of the formal caution. "I arrest you, Garnet Effra, for the murder of Wilfred Gordon, and it is my duty to warn you that you need say nothing now, but that anything you do say will be taken down and may be used in evidence at your trial."

Effra walked past him blindly, escorted by the two constables.

"Wilfred Gordon?" Manbre asked curiously.

"The poor devil they fished out of Limehouse Reach," Rosewarne said shortly. "We shall probably find the name in Effra's horrible little black book; he was vain enough to keep a record. By the way, Jack, get that child home as quickly as you can. She's had all she can take for one night."

Manbre coughed. "She has a mind of her own on that subject, sir."

Rosewarne felt a small, cold hand being pushed into his own. Mew Russell said in a low but confident voice, "You take me home, mister. You and Max."

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★ ★ ★

"The Raven" won our limerick competition for the best 5-line synopsis of an over-lengthy English poem.

The raven who tapped at my door
Turned out to be rather a bore.
Though the answers came pat
It was no merry chat,
Just one word at a time, never more.

A. J. SKIPPER

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THE FIFTH CANDLE

Every head turned, everyone smiled, as the cake came on

BY MARGERY SHARP

ONE WOMAN being lunched by five men, in an extremely elegant Paris restaurant, is naturally an object of envy and admiration—even if she is old, dowdy, and insignificant—whereas Ellen Croy was twenty-nine, as elegant as the restaurant, and wore success like an orchid corsage. Actually her flowers were lily-of-the-valley—muguet porte bonheur—just a couple of sprays pulled through an aquamarine pin.

Though it was more or less a business lunch, each of her companions would have been happy to entertain her for pleasure: one of Mrs. Croy's most delightful qualities, as M. Dubois pointed out in a short speech, being that she enabled them to combine business and pleasure in one.

They were in fact celebrating Ellen's fifth anniversary as Paris correspondent of a famous fashion magazine. Between them, the five men covered a great part of the French luxury trade, and they were thoroughly alive to the value of so careful and indefatigable a reporter. Ellen missed nothing and forgot nothing; she had extraordinary appreciation of both French artistry and British taste; also she was incorruptible. If Mrs. Croy found a beauty-product unsatisfactory, there was simply nothing to be done about it—except perhaps improve the product. In consequence, an increasing number of her fellow countrywomen never shopped in Paris without a cutting from an Ellen Croy article in their handbag—they felt such justified confidence in her.

In her own world she was most definitely a power; yet the lunch wasn't a tribute to her power alone, but an expression of genuine liking. Power, alone, might have commanded the caviare, but not the five-candled cake.

Every head in the restaurant turned, everyone smiled, as the cake came on.

"Blow!" cried M. Dupont (Lyons Silks) triumphantly.

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" All out in one breath, madame, and another happy five years for all of us! "

" Poor choristers that we are," lamented M. Dubois (Parfums du Midi,) " I fear ' Happy Birthday ' is quite beyond our powers! But *I* look even further, to ten years, madame, and twenty, of happy co-operation! "

Ellen laughed, and blew; sending out all the candles but one. " *That* one's in case I grow complacent," she said gaily. " To remind me how hard I must work to keep your good opinions—and the opinion they have of me at home."

No one ate the cake—they had eaten too well already—and with fivefold hand-kissings the party broke up.

It was Saturday. Each of her hosts, Ellen knew, was headed for the sacred, domestic weekend in the bosom of his family. The French are a very domestic race.

" May one call you a taxi? " suggested M. Dulac (Préparations de Beauté Ste Claire.)

" Thank you, I believe I'll walk," said Ellen, looking down the broad sunny Champs-Elysées.

" The British energy! " murmured M. Ducros (Gants et Elégances de Paris.) " Au revoir, then, dear madame—and remember our little showing next week! "

" Do I ever forget? " laughed Ellen.

Then they all went their ways, and left her alone . . .

A woman left alone in the broad sunny Champs-Elysées may still attract admiration, but scarcely envy. Ellen walked no more than a hundred yards before she sat down outside another café, where she ordered a lemonade and gave herself up to reflection.

She had all the time in the world, since for once her own weekend stretched blank before her. It was spring; none of her many friends were as yet settled en villégiature—camped for the summer on that patch of familial soil all French seemed to own; there was nowhere she could invite herself to outside Paris. Ellen visualised Mm. Dupont, Dubois, and Dulac merely shirt-sleeved in their town apartments; perhaps escorting their children to the Luxembourg Gardens or the Bois; certainly sitting down to a tremendous, familial Sunday dinner. Nor was there laid on, for that particular weekend, any one of the innumerable semi-fashionable, semi-charitable galas that keep the Paris pot a-boiling.

" Thank you, that's just how I like it," said Ellen Croy to the waiter bringing her citron pressé.

Blasé old tortoise that he was, even he looked at her admiringly. Ellen wasn't aware of it. She was envying Mm. Dupont, Dubois, and Dulac, in the bosoms of their families.

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As a natural sequence, she began to think about her husband. For they'd never been divorced. Occasionally it troubled Ellen—not because she wanted to marry anyone else, just because her tidy mind disliked loose ends. She and Tommy Croy had undoubtedly married too impulsively—as even their honeymoon in Paris discovered. Tommy intended to study art.

"Then study art!" Ellen adjured him, emerging from a month-long dream of love and kisses. "Spend all day in the Louvre, I'll be glad. I'll willingly bring you sandwiches, take notes, help all I can—so long as you don't just sit all day outside cafés!"

"Mayn't the warrior relax?" grinned Tommy.

At first Ellen was silenced. The memory of Tommy's service in Korea never failed to stir her compassion and respect. He'd hated, he proclaimed frankly, every moment of it—and been twice decorated. If his intent to study art was in part a reaction, if he'd temporarily exhausted his store of energy, how could Ellen rebuke? Outside cafés Tommy continued to sit.

He was very sure of her. He had reason to be: all else apart, they were most happy lovers. Only within marriage, indeed, could Ellen's fastidious morality have allowed her to accept, and return, such pleasures, but her husband she met in delight—as warm-blooded as he, as gay and loving and tender. For months, however cross-grained the day, night put all to rights again. But the days found them increasingly at odds.

This uncomfortable period was when Ellen learnt her excellent French. She couldn't bear to be idle, so she learnt French—thoroughly. When she returned to London a year later, she took with her at least this new acquirement. She didn't take her husband. Tommy was apparently rooted outside the Café des Abeilles—as rooted as the little bay trees in their green tubs. Like them, when winter came, he merely moved inside. But Ellen couldn't live without working, so she went home.

It wasn't a question of finance—Tommy had a small but sufficient income deriving from trust funds—it was simply that Ellen was a natural worker: the instinct to work so strong, she could even break the leash of love. They parted, contrary to modern manners, on rather bad terms, for Ellen at the last couldn't hold back her reproaches at his idleness, nor Tommy an accusation of nagging. Their subsequent communications were brief and tended to be hurtful. But they still weren't officially separated, and they still communicated—until Ellen wrote the letter announcing her wonderful piece of luck. It was her French that won it for her.

She had always been in journalism, and had some reputation.

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Now her French won her the prize-plum of a Paris assignment.

To this final letter, as it turned out to be, Tommy replied by telegram:

WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS HAVE GONE TO LIVE IN SPAIN.

After which, naturally, all communication ceased.

Ellen settled into a charming apartment near the Etoile. Her work, so soon to be so outstandingly successful, occupied her fully. On the side she made many friends, she was invited everywhere, and if she was courted largely for her influence, it was because all the Frenchmen she met assumed she had a lover already. They didn't realise she kept her apartment full of flowers as a matter of course. For five years, between work and play, Ellen had never a dull moment; and sensibly dismissing Tommy from her mind, rarely, for more than a moment, thought of him at all . . .

Now, sitting alone after her anniversary lunch-party—envying Mm. Dubois, Dupont, and Ducros—she thought of him wishfully.

Why not? thought Ellen. Why not at least *see* Tommy again?

Their semi-detached position was in any case absurd; she ought to see him again, Ellen told herself, if only to arrange a divorce. Or possibly, if Tommy had mended his ways, to make a fresh start.

And to have a husband again . . . Someone who would be always there, weekend or weekday, to relax and be comfortable with—without the necessity of making a date . . . Someone to sit at home with in the feminine equivalent of shirtsleeves! More important, someone with whom to work together, to pull together, as man and woman should.

As a result of which train of thought, Ellen paid for her lemonade and hailed a passing taxi. For she felt pretty certain, and always had done, that Tommy was still in Paris. He adored Paris—and moreover she well remembered a previous attempt on Spain during the year they were together: when before the complications of visas and currency Tommy's happy indolence swiftly resumed the upper hand, and they went to Fontainebleau instead.

After such a rebuff as his wire, pride naturally forbade her to seek him out, and for five years, most carefully, she had avoided the vicinity of the Café des Abeilles—carefully, and easily; her new lines lay in more elegant quarters—but she now gave the once-familiar address with a good deal of confidence. Even a reformed Tommy might well be found outside his favourite café on a Saturday afternoon.

At a familiar corner Ellen paid off the taxi and got out. She intended to be strolling by . . . Also she wanted to see Tommy

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first, if he was there to be seen, before Tommy saw *her*. It was quite on the cards, Ellen realised, that he mightn't be alone. If he was with another man, well and good; if with another woman, the meeting might be better postponed. One doesn't re-enter one's husband's life after an interval of five years without a little stage-management.

But Tommy Croy was alone.

From the other side of the narrow street Ellen stood a moment contemplating him. So far as appearance went, he hadn't changed by a hair. Long and lanky, lint-headed and brown-skinned, there he lounged over his cognac as if it were yesterday; and it might have been yesterday as, at the sight of the long scar running from cheek- to jaw-bone, Ellen's heart turned over.

She crossed the street, and said, "Tommy!"

He looked up. If he was surprised he didn't show it. He simply reached out a long arm, and took Ellen by the wrist, and pulled her down into the seat beside him. He might have been expecting her.

"Coffee and cognac?" invited Tommy Croy. "Or are you still teetotal until dusk?"

"Not today," said Ellen, laughing. "Today I've just been stood a gala lunch!"

"Ah, but what day aren't you stood a gala lunch?" said Tommy. "You, the most successful woman in Paris?"

Ellen sat back and relaxed in turn. That he knew so much made everything a lot easier.

"You've actually been following my career?" she said lightly.

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"In all the illustrateds, darling! 'Madame Croy at the Versailles fête,' and all the other fêtes. I can't tell you how fascinating it's been," said Tommy affectionately, "to lurk in the shadows and watch my loved one hogging the limes! Dear Ellen, you have my warmest congratulations!"

There was a slight pause.

"As you said once before," remarked Ellen. "In your wire."

The pause became slightly awkward. Now they were neither of them quite so relaxed.

"In my wire," agreed Tommy. "Hadn't we better cut all that out, darling? As you no doubt observe," he added, "I'm not in Spain after all."

"I thought you mightn't be," said Ellen.

"You did? Now, why was that?" inquired Tommy, with fictitious interest.

"Visas," said Ellen briefly. "All right, let's cut it out. I'm willing . . . Tell me what you're doing yourself, Tommy."

He grinned. He was grateful to her, but he grinned.

"Studying art."

Ellen moved so abruptly that the arm of her little iron chair jarred against the little iron table; saucers rattled.

"Still," added Tommy.

"Will you listen just a moment?" asked Ellen.

"I'd much rather look at you."

"You can look as well! Listen, Tommy: I can get you space on the paper, I know I can. You could cover all the art exhibitions—"

"You've grown so beautiful," said Tommy.

"You could make a real success, I'm sure of it!" cried Ellen.

"You're much more beautiful than when I married you."

"The paper needs an art critic, London's written about it—"

"Come home, and don't talk so much," said Tommy Croy.

Familiar again was the four-flights-up, cold-water apartment; familiar again the big double French bed. To yawn and stretch next morning beside a familiar husbandly warmth—how familiar, and how deeply satisfying!

"What time is it?" murmured Ellen sleepily.

"Sunday-time."

Very late, that Sunday morning, they took a picnic into the Bois; and lazed all afternoon on the fresh grass; and watched children playing ball with their papas—amongst them, quite possibly, Mm. Ducros, Dubois, and Dulac. Never was a prettier spring day; as though Paris had been listening to all the songs about itself. Perpetually Ellen and Tommy caught each other's eyes, directing them upon immaculate, fresh-leaved branch,

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or some immaculate, freshly-laundered infant, or even upon some immaculate blade of grass . . .

With so much to talk about, it was odd how silent they were—or perhaps not so odd—Ellen noticed all around them pairs of lovers equally dumb. Falling in love, she decided, was a rather silencing thing. She had no doubt that she had fallen in love with Tommy all over again, as he with her. That they were already married, though a simplification, merely gave them less to talk about, since it is the how and where, the if and when, of marrying, that lovers most urgently need to discuss.

Only as the sun began to set, and Tommy declared it time to go home, did Ellen remember that she possessed a separate home of her own.

"Would you like to see my apartment, Tommy?"

"Angel, I have seen it," said Tommy, grinning again, "in all the illustrateds. The female executive's dream-nest . . ."

So Ellen left him in the taxi outside while she ran up and filled a suitcase. The charming rooms didn't detain her a moment—not the big living-room where she entertained, nor the bedroom with its specially designed cupboards, nor the prize-winning, peach-tiled kitchen. She didn't even pause to water the carnation-pots: "Madame Croy's famous Malmaisons." She simply filled a suitcase—hasty as an eloping wench—and ran down again to Tommy in the taxi.

They dined at Les Abeilles, and again went early to bed.

"What day is it?" murmured Ellen sleepily.

"Monday."

"I ought to phone the office."

"Phone and tell 'em to go to hell."

If Ellen temporised, it was because the office forced her to. Her personal secretary, obviously scenting some personal crisis, at once swung into sympathetic action. "You won't be coming in, Mrs. Croy, or keeping your engagements—for how long?"

"I've really no idea," said Ellen. "Of course, I'll let London know . . ." She was speaking from the Café des Abeilles, Tommy's apartment having no telephone; the bang and clatter of a service door formed an unusual obbligato, across which, after a brief interval, the voice of her Paris editor cut, bland and cool.

"Your secretary tells me, Ellen, you request a month's leave for urgent family reasons? Well, of course, Ellen dear—especially as I think you've covered all the spring showings?"

"Yes, I have," babbled Ellen, "though even if I hadn't—"

"You're so valuable to us, we wouldn't say a thing," affirmed

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the fluting editorial voice. "Just be assured of our sympathy—and come back soon!"

Ellen made Tommy laugh all through luncheon, reporting this exchange. 'Get well soon,' she swore, was what that voice had really meant.

"Love is a malady indeed," agreed Tommy. "Possibly chronic, don't you think?"

"Quite possibly," agreed Ellen.

They agreed, now, on every point. When Tommy suggested a run through the Midi, only Paris was really rather perfect, Ellen at once agreed that Paris was far too perfect to leave. When Ellen suggested that though cafés were perfectly delightful, to eat at home would be nice too, Tommy at once agreed that eating at home was much nicer than dining at Les Abeilles.

Actually Ellen wasn't entirely at ease in Les Abeilles. Tommy was too well known there. How naturally, after five years' frequentation! No one could have been more solicitous of Ellen than madame la patronne; the admiration of the habitués was both frank and respectful, but Ellen sensed there something inimical to her. A thin dark girl with an urchin-cut dropped a hand, in passing, a trifle too familiarly on Tommy's shoulder; a gang of students, as they left, honked the horn of their ancient car at him in too-familiar invitation. Tommy grinned and called them a bunch of kids, as obviously they were; they were still a part of his life Ellen hadn't shared, and didn't wish him to be reminded of . . . It was thus a double pleasure to cook him, at home, succulent steak or roast lamb—Tommy squaring to the table in shirtsleeves.

Shopping each morning was another pleasure, with Tommy beside to marvel at her French, and at her address in bargaining.

"How ever did you manage without me?" exclaimed Ellen.

"I just ate at Les Abeilles," explained Tommy. "I was too busy studying art to shop."

Ellen helped him study. Just as she'd longed for him to do on their honeymoon, Tommy now on at least three mornings a week set off for the Louvre, demanding sandwiches brought in at noon. As provided by Ellen they were the most exotic sandwiches in Paris—curried shrimps between brown bread, lobster pâté, smoked ham refreshed by slivers of melon. Then Tommy dictated to her what he thought about the *Mona Lisa*, or about Ingres' *Bain Turc*, or Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*; displaying a flair and style that rejoiced Ellen's heart.

Sometimes in the evening, before going home, they just dropped into Les Abeilles for an apéritif; but never stayed long.

When Tommy wasn't working, they spent hour after hour in

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strolls through the ever-enchanting Paris streets. To Ellen they were particularly enchanted, for she savoured a delicious sense of being incognito. She felt like Haroun al Raschid moving unrecognised among his subjects. To stroll arm-in-arm with Tommy past the door of a famous fashion-house—aware that if she but put her nose through, the whole establishment would buzz like an excited beehive—made Ellen giggle like a schoolgirl.

Once, in a chemist's shop on the rue de Rivoli, she actually saw a pretty little English girl, obviously on her honeymoon, take an Ellen Croy cutting from her bag, and insist on a cake of Ste Claire beauty-soap. Ellen stood there beside her: recognising only a compatriot—" I just pin my faith on Ellen Croy," smiled the little bride, " don't you? "

" I certainly do! " Ellen smiled back—rejoicing that the photograph heading her monthly section was too glamorous to betray her.

" Actually it doesn't do you justice," criticised Tommy. Ellen had been touched to the heart to find that he'd bought her paper every month. The flat was quite littered with back-numbers. " It makes you look just terribly, terribly *chic*," criticised Tommy. " Don't they know my girl's beautiful? "

He never tired of telling her she was beautiful; often at the most unlikely moments. As Ellen shelled a pan of peas or divided an avocado pear—" Hold it, will you? " begged Tommy. " You look too like a Modigliani to be true. Remember I'm studying art, darling."

He never tired of telling her she was beautiful; or of strolling through the Paris streets; or of dining at home, earlier and earlier, in his shirtsleeves; but he did get tired of going to the Louvre.

" Why not let's go to the Bois instead? " suggested Tommy.

" Why break a good habit? " returned Ellen lightly.

So he went to the Louvre once or twice more. Then he dug his heels in.

" On a morning like this, it's a sin to be under a roof."

" My goodness," cried Ellen, " I've covered dress-shows with the thermometer at eighty! "

" I bet you have, darling . . ."

This was their first approach to a disagreement, and it was Ellen who gave way.

" Very well, let's take a picnic."

So they lazed all that day in the Bois—and the next day, and the day after. As though the weather was in league with idlers, morning after morning dawned sunny and warm—and in her office, her Paris editor murmured, " Ellen's certainly picked a

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good moment!" But though like the couples around them Ellen and Tommy were often silent, their silence wasn't now entirely loverlike. Each had begun to follow their own thoughts—that is, if Tommy was thinking at all, which Ellen doubted.

"Tommy."

"My love?"

"Isn't it time we began to plan our future?"

Tommy yawned.

"Why? Can you think of anything better than this? I can't. Let's just go on as we've begun."

"But we aren't," said Ellen sharply. "You went to the Louvre every other day . . . Oh, I'm not simple!" cried Ellen. "I know you may never *be* an authority, but at least you've the chance! You've intelligence, and background, and an eye for colour and composition. You need only to work . . ."

He rolled over on the young grass and made a frame of his hands, sighting up at a bird on bough.

"Mayn't I just enjoy?"

Ellen was very fair-minded. She recognised that he had his own way of life—if more a European one than a British. But she had a career too.

"And am I just to help you enjoy yourself?"

Tommy rolled over again and buried his face in her lap.

"As how you do, my love! Isn't that enough?"

Actually it wasn't quite enough, for Ellen. If she was to be the passive ancillary to a male, she needed that male to be complementarily active.

Ellen would have made a very good wife for a doctor, or a missionary, in some remote necessitous region. She was essentially a worker. But she stroked the scar on Tommy's cheek in renewed silence . . .

This was a disagreement but not a quarrel.

Nor did they quarrel that evening, though only narrowly avoiding one, in the Café des Abeilles. They sat there longer than usual—until the gang of students and the girl with the urchin-cut roared up in their battered old car and hived at the next table.

Tommy slewed his chair round till he was practically one of their party. His French wasn't classic like Ellen's, but it obviously sufficed for adolescent banter. The racket and showing-off began to get on Ellen's nerves.

"Is *this* enough for you too?" she asked coldly.

"In point of fact, they're a pretty bright bunch," said Tommy. "What are you used to?"

"Intelligent conversation," said Ellen.

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It was the truth. In the last five years she had become used to very intelligent conversation indeed. A Lyons silk-merchant projecting new designs carried in his head the whole picture of textile exports; a new line from Dior could have world-wide repercussions. National economy and creative fashion, what was going on in the theatre, what was going on at the art galleries, had too long been the staple of what Ellen called conversation for her to be enthralled by student witticisms. She felt, and looked, bored.

" If my friends aren't good enough for you—" began Tommy.

It was the corny, classic phrase that saved them. It was too corny to be taken seriously.

" O.K., darling; let's go home," said Tommy.

" Tommy."

" Yes? "

" I've never asked questions," said Ellen, " but in the five years we've been apart, I don't suppose you've lived an exactly celibate life? "

It was a morning or two later. Ellen had so little intended to begin anything serious that she actually stood, filet in hand, ready to set off marketing. The words came out of her mouth.

And Tommy was still seated at the breakfast-table—last cup of coffee half emptied, his morning paper, *Le Figaro*, spread across his plate. For a moment, because he didn't look up, Ellen wondered whether he'd heard. For a moment, she almost hoped he hadn't. Then—

" You suppose correctly," said Tommy Croy.

Again the words spoke for themselves.

" Was it that girl at Les Abeilles? "

Now he did look up. A peculiar look passed over his face: a look at once of extreme repugnance and of resolution. But he answered only obliquely.

" Have you lived a celibate life either, my love? "

Ellen was so startled, she in turn took a moment to reply—simply because she was so startled.

" Yes, of course I have! " she cried. " Indeed I have! "

" But you haven't, you know," said Tommy Croy deliberately. He pushed the paper away; he looked at her. " I'm not speaking of the obvious carnal infidelities—such as you can lay at my door. You gave yourself, my darling," said Tommy deliberately, " to a high-class magazine. All your wit and loyalty, even your beauty to decorate a two-page spread—"

" Stop," said Ellen.

She knew it to be a moment for the greatest care, a moment

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for considering carefully every word. She came slowly back into the room and dropped her filet on the table.

"Can you remember," she began, "that English girl in the chemist's, on the rue de Rivoli?"

"The woods are full of 'em," shrugged Tommy Croy.

"She trusted me," said Ellen. "She trusted Ellen Croy. As thousands of other women trust me. *That's* why I 'gave myself,' as you call it, to the paper. As an interpreter between Paris and London, I've been able to do something quite worthwhile. I've also," said Ellen, "made a certain impression over here. I back Préparations de Beauté Ste Claire, for instance, even though I'm offered an apartment on the Riviera, rent-free, by their rivals who use substitutes.

"I've never paid less than couturier-price to any dressmaker in Paris. I've driven into certain thick heads the notion of incorruptibility—English incorruptibility. And the paper's backed me to the hilt. It's used all the best in me," said Ellen, "and that's how I want to be used."

There was a considerable pause.

"Then hadn't you better go back to it?" said Tommy Croy.

So they came to the moment of decision. Not a disagreement, not a quarrel: the moment of decision. Ellen felt her knees weaken; she sat down.

"I never guessed—" she began, and broke off. She couldn't bring herself to say it—that you were jealous. Jealous of the paper, or jealous of her success?

Perhaps both, thought Ellen, with sudden, unhappy comprehension. Another and more trivial thought struck her: that her second honeymoon, like her first, had lasted barely more than a month.

"Well?" said Tommy. "You've certainly given the paper a fine build-up; what about it?"

"Are you asking me to choose?"

"I believe I am," said Tommy Croy. "I might stomach, my angel, a flesh-and-blood cher ami—as you've probably noticed, with reprobation, I'm sufficiently gallicised for that—but I'm damned if I'll have you yearning after an office desk!"

"You haven't understood at all."

He shrugged.

"If you mean, just because one silly young girl in a beauty-parlour—"

"She wasn't silly. She was sweet. And there are thousands of them!"

"She should never have left home."

"You won't even try to understand," said Ellen helplessly.

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"No; I just ask you to choose," said Tommy Croy.

Ellen stood up and looked at him. Another irrelevant thought crossed her mind: the memory of a fifth candle, the one she hadn't blown out. To remind me in case I grow complacent! she'd cried. Perhaps it had been to remind her that one day she would have to choose.

Between her husband . . .

No, thought Ellen suddenly. Tommy isn't really my husband. A husband is someone you pull together with, work together with. It's Tommy who is my cher ami . . .

Yet she made a last attempt.

"I've said it before, Tommy, but we could both be on the paper together. If you knew how I'd enjoy playing second fiddle to you! You've only to work— Good heavens," cried Ellen, "you can't *still* be relaxing after Korea!"

He pushed back his chair, so violently that it rocked against the wall.

"Will you, for God's sake, stop preaching!" said Tommy loudly. "I'm just asking you, as *I* said before, to choose."

Again there was a long pause.

"I'm sorry," said Ellen sadly, "but I've chosen. And this time it's for good."

Someone had watered her carnation-pots.

"The young lady, madame's secretary," explained the concierge, bustling in at Ellen's heels. "Naturally, I let her have the key. I hope I was correct?"

"Perfectly correct," said Ellen. "Thank you."

She looked curiously round the big living-room, appreciating afresh all its comfort and elegance. How nice it was! Then she went to the telephone.

"Mrs. Croy, I am so glad to hear you!" cried her secretary thankfully. "And shan't we all be glad to have you back!"

"Thank you for watering my carnations," said Ellen. "Have you been in every day?"

"Goodness, Mrs. Croy, it was the least I could do," cried her secretary. "I just ran round first with some personal letters—you'll find them on the bureau—and when you weren't there—"

"You came in every day," said Ellen. "Thank you, Jenny."

She sat down at her desk and slit open a dozen or so envelopes. Half her friends in Paris—including Mm. Dupont, Dulac, and Ducros—seemed to have learnt of her being called away for those urgent family reasons of Jenny's improvisation. They were very nice letters—the French more formal, those from London more

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warm—but all displaying a genuine concern, and all begging her to come back soon . . . *Since without our gracious interpreter . . . Without our Ellen on the job . . . Dearest madame, Paris needs you! . . . Whatever it is, darling Ellen, remember we're your hell-or-high-water friends!*

How nice they all were! And I'm back, thought Ellen.

She was very glad of it. She had no doubts, no misgivings. She would have made the same decision again, every time.

Yet it was only natural that for a few minutes, she wept.

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★ ★ ★

AUNT-EATER?

Hygiene is a compulsory credit subject, [at Columbia University] and Hygiene turned out to be roughly speaking, what we think of as the Facts of Life.

The American obsession with sex, often, it is true, in the nicest way, is a remarkable thing.

I remember one evening when the family was at dinner, Humphrey announcing that he had had another Hygiene paper which had been much easier than the last. I asked him idly what the questions were like.

" There were only two," he said. " The first was ' When were you first told the facts of life and were you satisfied with the environment in which they were conveyed to you? ' "

" Good Lord," I said. " How on earth did you answer that? "

" Well, I said that the facts of life were first told me by my parents, they were then told me by the Headmaster of my prep school. Then they were told me by my Housemaster at my public school, and after that we were encouraged to forget them."

This I thought was a masterly reply and said so. Then I asked about the second question.

" Oh that! We were asked, ' If you were wrecked on a desert island and only one other person could be there whom would you choose? ' "

" You didn't say Lucy," said his sister, naming his current girl friend (whose name was not really Lucy.)

" As a matter of fact I did."

" What, with that horrible squeaky voice? " says Jane with brutal, sisterly candour.

" Well," said Humphrey indignantly, " it was a jolly good thing that I did. One chap put his aunt and he was sent to see the psychiatrist."

BERNARD MOORE, *The Second Lesson*

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FOREVER VOYAGE

It was a strange ship-house in the prairies stranded without canvas

BY RAY BRADBURY

"GOOD morning, captain."

"Good morning, Hanks."

"Coffee's ready, sir; sit down."

"Thank you, Hanks." The old man sat by the galley table, his hands in his lap.

He looked at them, and they were like speckled trout idling beneath frosty waters, the exhalation of his faint breath on the air. He had seen such trout as these surfacing in the mountain streams when he was ten. He became fascinated with their trembling motion there below, for as he watched they seemed to grow paler.

"Captain," said Hanks, "you all right?"

The captain jerked his head up and flashed his old burning glance. "Of course! What do you mean, am I all right?"

The cook put down the coffee from which rose warm vapours of women so far gone in his past that they were only dark musk and rubbed incense to his nose. Quite suddenly he sneezed, and Hanks was there with a cloth.

"Thank you, Hanks." He blew his nose and then tremblingly drank the brew. "Hanks?"

"Yes, sir, captain?"

"The barometer is falling."

Hanks turned to stare at the wall. "No, sir, it's fair and mild; that's what it says, fair and mild."

"The storm is rising, and it will be a long time and a hard pull before another calm."

"I won't have that kind of talk!" said Hanks, circling him.

"I must say what I feel. The calm had to end one day. The storm had to come. I've been ready now a long time."

A long time, yes. How many years? The sand fell through the glass beyond counting. The snows fell through the glass, too, applying and reapplying whiteness to whiteness, burying deeper and yet deeper winters beyond recall.

He got up, swaying to the galley door, opened it, and stepped

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forth on to the porch of a house built like the prow of a ship, on to a porch whose deck was tarred ship's timbers. He looked down upon not water but the summer-baked dirt of his front yard. Moving to the rail, he gazed upon gently rolling hills that spread for ever in any direction you wheeled to strike your eye.

What am I doing here? he thought with sudden wildness, on a strange ship-house stranded without canvas in the midst of lonesome prairies, where the only sound is bird shadow one way in autumn, another way come spring. What, indeed!

He quieted, raising the binoculars which hung from the rail to survey the emptiness of land as well as life.

Kate, Katherine, Katie, where are you? he thought. He was always forgetting by night, drowned deep in his bed, remembering by day when he came forth from memory. He was alone and had been alone for twenty years now, save for Hanks, the first face at dawn, the last at sundown.

And Kate? A thousand storms and a thousand calms ago there had been a calm and a storm that had stayed on the rest of his life.

"There she is, Kate!" He heard his early-morning voice, running along the dock. "There's the ship that will take us wherever we want to go!"

And again they moved, incredible pair. Kate miraculously what? Twenty-five at most. And himself leaning far into his forties, but no more than a child holding her hand, drawing her up the gangplank.

Then, hesitant, Kate turned to face the Alexandrian hills of San Francisco and said half aloud to herself or no one, "I shall never touch land again."

"The trip's not that long."

"Oh yes," she said quietly. "It will be a very long journey."

And for a moment all he heard was the immense creaking of the ship, like a Fate turning in its sleep.

"Now why did I say that?" she asked. "Silly." She put her foot out and stepped aboard the ship.

They sailed that night for the southern isles, a groom with the skin of a tortoise and a bride as lithe as a salamander dancing on the fiery hearth of the afterdeck on August afternoons.

Then, midway in the voyage, a calm fell upon the ship like a great warm breath, an exhalation that collapsed the sails in a mournful yet a peaceful sigh.

Perhaps this sigh wakened him, or perhaps it was Katie, rising up to listen. Not a rat-scurry of rope, not a whisper of canvas, not a rustle of naked feet on the deck. The ship was spellbound

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for certain. It was as if the moon, rising, had said a single silver word, " Peace."

The men, fastened to their stations by the incantation of the word, did not turn when the captain moved out on to the deck with his wife and sensed that Now had become Eternity.

And then, as if she could read the future in the mirror that held the ship fast, she said fervently, " There's never been a finer night, nor two happier people on a better ship. Oh, I wish we could stay here a thousand years; this is perfect, our own world where we make our own laws and live by them. With all this, promise you'll never let me die."

" Never," he said. " Shall I tell you why? "

" Yes, and make me believe it."

He remembered then and told her of a story he had heard once of a woman so lovely the gods were jealous of time and put her to sea, and said she might never touch shore again where the earth might burden her with gravity and weaken her with vain encounters, senseless excursions, and wild alarms that would cause her death. If she stayed on the water she would live for ever and be beautiful.

So she sailed many years, passing the island where her lover grew old. Time and again she called to him, demanding that he summon her ashore. But, fearful of her destruction, he refused; and one day she took it on herself to land and run to him. And they had one night together—a night of beauties and wonder—before he found her, when the sun rose, a very old woman, a withered leaf, at his side.

" Did I hear the story once? " he asked. " Or will someone tell it later, and are we part of it? Is that why I've carried you off from the land, so the noise and traffic and millions of people and things can't wear you away? "

But Kate was laughing at him now. She threw her head back and let the sound out, for every man's head turned, every mouth smiled.

" Tom, Tom, remember what I said before we sailed? I'd never touch land again. I must have guessed your reason for running off with me. All right then, I'll stay on board wherever we go around the world. Then I'll never change, and you won't either, will you? "

" I'll always be forty-eight." And he laughed, too, glad he had got the darkness out of himself, holding her shoulders and kissing her throat, which was like bending to winter at the heart of August. And that night, in the blazing calm that would last for ever, she was a fall of snow in his bed.

" Hanks! Do you remember the calm in August '97? " The

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old man examined his faraway hands. " How long did it last? "

" Nine, ten days, sir."

" No, Hanks. I swear it, we lived nine full years in those days of the calm."

Nine days, nine years. And in the midst of those days and years he had thought, Oh, Kate, I'm glad I brought you, I'm glad I didn't let the others joke me out of making myself younger by touching you.

Love is everywhere, they said: waiting on the docks, underneath the trees, like warm coconuts to be fondled, nuzzled, drunk. But they were wrong. Poor drunken souls, let them wrestle apes in Borneo, melons in Sumatra, what could they build with dancing monkeys and dark rooms? Sailing home, those captains slept with themselves. Themselves! Such sinful company, ten thousand miles. No, Kate, no matter what, there's us.

And the great deep breathing calm went on at the centre of the ocean world, beyond which lay nothing, the dreadnought continents, sunk by time.

But on the ninth day the men themselves let down the boats and sat in them, waiting for orders, and there was nothing for it but to row for a wind, the captain joining his men.

Toward the end of the tenth day an island came slowly up over the horizon. He called to his wife, " Kate, we'll row in for provisions. Will you come along? "

She stared at the island as if she had seen it somewhere long before she was born, and shook her head slowly, no. " Go on. I won't touch land until we're home."

And looking up at her he knew that she was, by instinct, living the legend he had so lightly spun and told. Like the golden woman in the myth, she sensed some secret evil on a lonely swelter of sand and coral that might diminish or, more, destroy her.

" God bless you, Kate! Three hours." And he rowed away to the island with his men.

Late in the day they rowed back with five kegs of fresh sweet water and the boats odorous with warm fruit and flowers.

And waiting for him was Kate, who would not go ashore, who would not, she said, touch ground. She was first to drink the clear cool water.

Brushing her hair, looking out at the unmoved tides that night, she said, " It's almost over. There'll be a change by morning. Oh, Tom, hold me. After its being so warm, it'll be so cold."

In the night he woke. Kate, breathing in the dark, murmured. Her hand fell upon him, white-hot. She cried out in her sleep. He felt her wrist and there first heard the rising of the storm.

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As he sat by her, the ship lifted high on a great slow breast of water, and the spell was broken. The slack canvas shuddered against the sky. Every rope hummed as if a huge hand had passed down the ship as over a silent harp, calling forth fresh sounds of voyaging.

The calm over, one storm began. Another followed. Of the two storms, one ended abruptly—the fever that raged in Kate and burnt her to white dust. A great silence moved in her body and then did not move at all.

The sailmender was summoned to dress her for the sea. The motion of his needle flickering in the underwater light of the cabin was like a tropic fish, sharp, thin, infinitely patient, nibbling away at the shroud, skirting the dark, sealing the silence in.

In the final hours of the vast storm above, they brought the white calm from below and let her free in a fall that tore the sea only a moment. Then, without trace, Kate and life were gone.

"Kate, Kate, oh, Kate!"

He could not leave her there, lost to the tidal flows between the Japan Sea and the Golden Gate. Weeping that night, he stormed himself out of the storm. Gripped to the wheel, he circled the ship again and again round that wound that had healed with untimely swiftness.

Then he knew a calm that lasted the rest of his days. He never raised his voice or clenched his fist again to any man. And with that pale voice and unclenched fist he turned the ship away at last from the unscarred surface, circled the earth, delivered his goods, then turned his face from the sea for all time.

Leaving his ship to nudge the green-mantled dock, he walked and rode inland fifteen hundred miles. Blindly he bought land and blindly he built, with Hanks, not knowing for a long while what he had bought or built. Only knowing that he had always been too old, and had been young for a short hour with Kate, and now was very old indeed and would never chance such an hour again.

So, in mid continent, fifteen hundred miles from the sea on the east, fifteen hundred from the hateful sea on the west, he damned the life and the water he had known—remembering not what had been given, but what had been so swiftly taken away.

On this land, then, he walked out and cast forth seed, prepared himself for his first harvest and called himself farmer.

But one night in that first summer of living as far from the sea as any man could get, he was waked by an incredible, a familiar sound. Trembling in his bed, he whispered, "No, no, it can't be. I'm mad. But listen."

He opened the farmhouse door to look upon the land. He

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stepped out on the porch, spellbound by this thing he had done without knowing it. He held to the porch rail and blinked, wet-eyed, out beyond his house.

There in the moonlight, hill after slow-rising hill of wheat blew in tidal winds with the motion of waves. An immense Pacific of grain shimmered off beyond seeing, with his house, his now-recognised ship, becalmed in its midst.

He stayed out half that night, striding here, standing there, stunned with the discovery, lost in the deeps of this inland sea. And with the following years, tackle by tackle, timber by timber, the house shaped itself to the size, feel, and thrust of ships he had sailed in crueller winds and deeper waters.

"How long, Hanks, since we last saw water?"

"Twenty years, captain."

"No, yesterday morning."

As he came back through the door, his heart pounded. The wall barometer clouded over and flickered with a faint lightning that played along the rims of his eyelids.

"No coffee, Hanks. Just a cup of clear water." Hanks went away and came back. "Hanks? Promise. Bury me where she is."

"But, captain, she's—" Hanks stopped. He nodded. "Where she is. Yes, sir."

"Good. Now give me the cup."

The water was fresh. It came from the islands beneath the earth. It tasted of sleep.

"One cup. She was right, Hanks, you know. Not to touch land ever again. She was right. But I brought her one cup of water from the land, and the land was in the water that touched her lips. One cup. Oh, if only—"

He shifted it in his rusted hands. A typhoon swarmed from nowhere, filling the cup. It was a black storm raging in a small place. He raised the cup and drank the typhoon.

"Hanks!" someone cried. But not he. The typhoon, storming, had gone, and him with it. The cup fell empty to the floor.

It was a mild morning. The air was sweet, and the wind steady. Hanks had worked half the night digging and half the morn filling. Now the work was done.

The town minister helped, and then stood back as Hanks jigsawed the final squares of sod in place. Piece after piece he fitted neatly and tamped and joined. And on each piece, as Hanks had made certain, was the tall, the golden, the full, rich, ripe-grained wheat, as high as a ten-year-old boy.

Hanks bent and put the last piece to rest.

"No marker?" asked the minister.

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"Oh no, sir, and never will be one."

The minister started to protest; then Hanks took his arm and walked him up the hill a way. Then he turned and pointed back.

They stood a long moment.

The minister nodded at last, smiled quietly and said, "I see. I understand."

For there was just the ocean of wheat going on and on for ever, vast tides of it blowing in the wind, moving east and ever east beyond, and not a line or seam or ripple to show where the old man sank from sight.

"It was a sea burial," said the minister.

"It was," said Hanks. "As I promised. It was, indeed."

Then they turned and walked off along the hilly shore, saying nothing again until they reached and entered the creaking house.

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★ ★ ★

MARE IN THE SEA

Spurred by the prickings of desire
Proudly she breaks the sea,
To lash the endless waters
With young triumphant hoofs.
White flies the foam her passion strikes:
Deep is the waves' embrace
That holds her as she swims.
Her nostrils quiver as she stirs the storm
That rushes darkly suddenly upon her,
Pulling her mane with gentle frantic fingers,
Curling in waves against her flanks,
Thrusting the edge of his fury
Against her wildness.
Now she is aware
Of mutual strength.
Now she has beaten her way
Through the surging of the waters
And stands upon the beach.
The storm has gone:
The waves
Lap sweetly at her hoofs.
Trembling she turns an eye of milky wonder
Kindly towards the sea,
Towards her lover.

BRYAN GUINNESS

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Monarch Restored

The royal refugee . . .

DANIEL DEFOE

This day his Majestie Charles the Second came to London after a sad and long exile and calamitous suffering both of the King and Church, being 17 yeares. This was also his birth-day, and with a triumph of above 20,000 horse and foote, brandishing their swords and shouting with inexpressible joy; the wayes strew'd with flowers, the bells ringing, the streetes hung with tapissry, fountains running with wine . . . Lords and Nobles clad in cloth of silver, gold and velvet; the windows and balconies all set with ladies; trumpets, music, and myriads of people.

JOHN EVELYN, *Diary*, 29 *May*, 1660

The Rightful Heir

An anxious youth, rather shabby, hung around the council chambers but never succeeded in getting an interview with either the French or Spanish officials. It was Charles II, and what he wanted was help in claiming his rightful inheritance, the throne of England . . . As usual, Charles had to go away disappointed.

Not even his most unworldly and optimistic friend would have guessed that day that within a few weeks—before this same Treaty of the Pyrenees was signed—he would be in London with the crown on his head, recalled by a weeping, cheering populace to triumphal parades and bonfires in the streets.

JOAN SANDERS, *The Devoted Mistress*

And welcome now (Great Monarch) to your own;
Behold the approaching Cliffs of Albion;
Oh happy Prince whom Heaven hath taught the way
By paying Vows to have more Vows to pay!

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Oh happy Age! Oh times like these alone,
By Fate reserved for great Augustus throne.
When the joint growth of Arms and Arts foreshow
The World a Monarch, and that Monarch you.

JOHN DRYDEN, *Astraea Redux*, 1660

Petticoat Lane

Divers maidens on behalf of themselves and others presented a petition to the Lord Mayor of London wherein they pray his Lordship to grant them leave and liberty to meet his majesty on the day of his passing through the City, and if their petition be granted that they will all be clad in white waistcoats and crimson petticoats and other ornaments of triumph and rejoicing.

RUEGGS' DIURNAL, *May* 1660

Viands of Delight

Twelve years compleat he suffer'd in Exile,
And kept his Father's Asses all the while.
At length by wonderful Impulse of Fate,
The People call him home to help the State;
And what is more, they send him money too,
And clothe him all, from Head to Foot, anew.
With Women, Wine and Viands of Delight,
His jolly Vassals feast him Day and Night . . .

ANON, *Poems of Affairs of State*, 1716

Understanding King

The King was then thirty years of age and as might have been supposed past the levities of youth and the extravagance of pleasure. He had a very good understanding . . . .

He said once to myself he was no atheist, but he could not think God would make a man miserable only for taking a little pleasure out of the way. He disguised his Popery to the last.

BISHOP BURNET

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Absence Makes the Heart—

On Monday he went to Rochester; and the next day being the nine and twentieth of May and his birthday he entered London; all the ways thither being so full of People and acclamations as if the whole Kingdom had been gathered there. Between Deptford and Southwark the Lord Mayor and Aldermen met him with all such Protestations of joy as can hardly be imagined.

The Concourse was so great that the King rode in a Crowd from the Bridge to Whitehall, all the Companies of the City standing in order on both sides and giving loud thanks to God for his Majesty's presence. He no sooner came to Whitehall but the two Houses of Parliament solemnly cast themselves at his feet with all vows of affection and fidelity to the world's end. In a word, the joy was so unexpressible and so universal that His Majesty said smilingly to some about him, " he doubted it had been his own fault he had been absent so long, for he saw nobody that did not protest he had ever wished for his return."

CLARENDON, *History of the Rebellion*

—Grow Fonder !

The Commons Petition to King Charles II:
In all Humanity we crave
Our Sovereign may be our Slave;
And humbly beg that he may be
Betrayed by us most Loyally.
But if he please once to lay down
His Scepter, Dignity, and Crown,
We'll make him, for the Time to come,
The greatest Prince in Christendom.
The King's Answer:
Charles at this Time having no Need,
Thanks you as much as if he did.

JOHN WILMOT, EARL OF ROCHESTER

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EARLY MARRIAGE

Through her window, the morning star
burnt like a brilliant candle

BY CONRAD RICHTER

FOR two days the leathery face of Asa Putman had been a document in cipher to anyone who could read the code.

Since Saturday but one traveller had passed his solitary post, a speck of adobe and picket corrals lost on the vast sandy stretch of the Santa Ana plain. Far as the eye could see from his doorway, the rutted El Paso trail, unfenced, gutterless, innocent of grading, gravels, culverts, or telephone poles, imprinted only by iron tyres, the hoofs of horses and oxen, sheep and cattle, and the paw of the loping lobo wolf, lay with dust unraised.

Ordinarily, there were freighters with cracking whips and trailers rumbling on behind. Army trains to and from the forts set up their tents for the night beyond the springs. The private coaches of Santa Fe and Colorado merchants, of cattle kings and Government officials, stopped long enough for the Putman children to admire the ladies, the magnificent woodwork, and the luxurious cushions inside. Trail herds of gaunt red steers bawled for the water in the earthen tank, and pairs and companies of horsemen rode up and down.

But since Saturday not even a solitary buckboard from the far settlements in the Cedar country had called for supplies or letters. Only a girl from the Blue Mesa had ridden in for her own and her neighbours' mail. She had eaten dinner with the Putmans, refused to stay overnight, and started her long ride home.

A stranger from the East would have spoken about the stillness, the deadly waiting, and asked uneasily why Uncle Gideon hadn't come as promised. But in the Putman household it was not mentioned.

Asa deliberately busied himself about the post, filling the bin beneath the counter with navy beans and green coffee, leafing through the packet of letters in the drawer, and making a long rite out of feeding the occupants of the picket corrals—four horses of which were fresh for the next stage.

Rife, just turned fifteen, carried water and gathered cow chips in an old hide dragged by a rope to his saddle horn. Ignacita, the

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Mexican housekeeper, spat sharply on her heavy irons in the torrid kitchen and kept glancing over her shoulder and out of the open door and windows.

And Nancy Belle, going on seventeen, packed and repacked the high iron-bound trunk that her father had bought for her at Santa Fe and sang softly to herself in the way that women sang fifty and sixty years ago. On Saturday she was being married at Gunstock, two hundred miles away—five days' journey in a wagon, four in a saddle or buckboard.

For six months she had thought of little else. The almanac fell apart at June as naturally as did her mother's Bible at the Twenty-third Psalm. So often had she run her finger down the page that anyone might tell from the worn line of type the very day she and Stephen Dewee would be man and wife.

The Dewees lived four hundred miles west across the territory in the Beaverhead country. She and Stephen were taking a mountain ranch near his people, and for the wedding they had compromised on Gunstock, nearly equidistant from both families and convenient to friends scattered up and down the Rio Grande.

She had lighted a candle in the dusk, when a figure appeared reluctantly in her doorway. Asa Putman had never been at ease in his daughter's bedroom. A tall rawhide man in an unbuttoned, sagging waistcoat, he was visibly embarrassed by any furnishings that suggested refinement. Invariably he kept his hat on in the house. He had it on now, a flat top and a flat brim, not so much like the Western hats you see now. Nancy Belle knew that her mother's people had never forgiven him for bringing his young wife and their two small children to this lonely post, at the mercy of outlaws and the worse Apaches.

Tonight she could see that something bothered him. He gave her a sideways glance, so sharp and characteristic.

"I don't expect, Nancy Belle, you could put off your weddin'?"

The girl stood quietly gazing at him with a face like the tintype of her mother. But under her sedate grey dress, with tight waist and full skirts to the instep, she had frozen. She looked much older than her years. Her gentle air and her wide-apart grey eyes came from her mother. But the chin, tipped up with resolute fearlessness, was her father's.

"No, Papa!" Her two clear words held all the steady insistence of the desert.

"I figured how you'd feel," he nodded, avoiding her eyes. "I just wanted to put it up to you. I'd 'a' covered the journey on foot to be on time at my own weddin', but I didn't count on Gideon holding me up."

"Are you telling me, Papa, that you can't go to Gunstock

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tomorrow?" Her voice remained quiet, but a coldness had seized her. Of all the people she had visualised at her wedding, the one next to Stephen she could least spare was the tall grave figure of her father.

"I reckon I kind of ain't, Nancy Belle," he said soberly. "Rife could tend to the stage all right and do the feedin'. But they's men come to this post no boy can handle." He shifted his position.

"I figured once on closin' up the post till I got back. But the stage is comin' and the mail. And the freighters count on me for feed and grub. Then I got to protect my own property and the mail and freight for the Cedar country that's in the storage-room."

"I know," Nancy Belle said steadily. "I can get to Gunstock all right."

Far back in her father's assaying eyes, she fancied she saw a glint of pride.

"You're pretty nigh a woman now, Nancy Belle. And Rife's a good slice of a man. It's a straight trail to the Rio Grande, once you turn at the old post. Both you and Rife's been over it before. Of course, I'd like to be at the weddin', but the boy can tell me about it."

He went to the window. "Rife!" he called.

Nancy Belle's brother came in presently. A slight boy, with his father's blue eyes, he seldom made a fuss over anything, even when he shot a stray duck on the tank or when they braked down the last cedar hill into Santa Fe with all the open doors of the plaza shops in sight. And when his father told him now, he showed neither enthusiasm nor regret—merely straightened.

"Sure. I can take you, Nancy Belle," he said.

Something pulled under his sister's tight basque. She remembered the long miles they would have in the wagon, the camps at lonely places, the ugly shadow ever hovering over the outposts of this frontier country, and the blight that, since Saturday, seemed to have fallen on the trail. Her eyes swam. Now, at the last minute, she yielded.

"If you'll let me ride, Papa, I'll wait another day for Uncle Gideon," she promised.

Her father's eyes moved to the ruffled red calico curtains at the windows.

"I don't hardly count on Gideon comin' any more, Nancy Belle. Besides, it's too long in the saddle to Gunstock—especially for a girl to get married. You'd be plumb wore out, and you wouldn't have your trunk. You couldn't get dressed for your weddin'."

He turned thoughtfully and went out, Rife close behind. Nancy

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Belle could hear her father's tones, slow and grave, coming from near one of the picket corrals.

It was too far to catch the words; but when they came in, she saw that her brother's features looked a little pale under the tan.

"You better get some sleep, Nancy Belle," her father said. "You and Rife are startin' before daylight. If Gideon comes, I'll ride after."

They had scarcely gone from the room when Ignacita came in from the kitchen, her black eyes glittering over a pile of freshly starched white in her arms.

"Nancy Belle, chinita!" she whispered, plucking at the girl's sleeve. "You don't say to your papacito I talk to you! I have promise I don't scare you. But I can't see you go far in the wildness alone, pobrecita! Sometimes people go safe from one place to the other, oh sí! But sometimes, chinita, they don't come back. You have not the oldness like Ignacita. Aye, I tell you these old eyes have seen men and women quartered from a tree like sheep, or maybe tied over a stove like I don't have the words to say to you."

Nancy Belle did not answer except to lay, one by one, the ironed pieces in her trunk—a bride's muslin underwear trimmed with red and blue feather stitching; long petticoats stiffly flounced with ruffles, and nightgowns long in the sleeve and high in the neck, with ruffles at wrist and throat.

The Mexican woman went on hoarsely.

The girl folded away her winter's cashmere dress, buttoned up the front and with a white fichu. She unwrapped and wrapped again in crumpled white tissue the red slippers the old gentleman on the stage had sent her as a wedding present from Philadelphia.

When Ignacita had left, she opened her keepsake box covered with coloured shells. The mirror on the inside lid turned back a face as calm as the little golden clouds that hung of an evening over the east to catch the desert sunset. But after she had undressed and put on her nightdress, for a long time she was aware of the soft pounding of her heart faintly swaying the bed on its rawhide springs.

At the first sound of Ignacita's hand on the kitchen stove, Nancy Belle sprang out of bed. She dressed on the brown pool of burro skin, the only carpet on her adobe floor. Through the west window she could see the morning star burning like a brilliant candle. It hung, she told herself, over Gunstock and the Beaverhead, where Stephen, in their new log ranch-house, lay thinking about her.

They ate in the kitchen by lamplight. She had never been so

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conscious of every detail—the great white cups and saucers, the familiar steel knives, the smell of the scorched paper lamp-shade, the unreadable eyes of her father, Rife, and Ignacita.

Asa Putman himself carried out the trunk. There was already hay in the wagon, a gunny sack of oats, food in a canned-tomato box and utensils in another, a water-keg, bed-roll tied in a wagon sheet, an axe, a bridle, and her own side-saddle, made to order over a man's tree.

Her eyes caught the gleam of a rifle leaning up against the seat in the lanternlight.

Tethered to the rear of the wagon stood her mare, Fancy, with pricked-up ears. She was going along to their new ranch home. Nancy Belle felt that she was still among intimate things, but outside the little circle of light lay darkness and the unknown.

When she said good-bye to her father, he kissed her—something he had not done for years.

"You haven't changed your mind, Nancy Belle?" he asked.

She climbed quickly up over the wheel to the spring seat of the wagon before he saw that she was crying. Rife swung up like a monkey on the other side and pushed the rifle into the crevice behind the seat cushion. The lines tautened and the wagon lurched.

"Dios go with you safe to your husband, Nancy Belle!" she heard Ignacita cry after her.

The morning star had set. They moved into a world of silent blackness. Nancy Belle could not see how the horses remained on the trail. When she looked back, the only light in all these square miles of black unfriendly earth was the yellow window of her father's post.

It was almost a vision, golden and far away, like all beautiful things. She didn't trust herself to look again.

Two hours later the wagon was a lonely speck of boat rocking in an illimitable sage-green sea that did not stop rolling till it washed up at the foot of the faintly blue ramparts of the distant Espiritu Range.

Just before they turned west on the cross trail to the Rio Grande, a heavy wagon with a yoke of oxen in front and a cow behind toiled round the crumbling adobe walls of the old abandoned post house. A bearded man and a thin woman with a white face sat on the seat. She held a baby in her arms, and three black-eyed children peered from under the wagon sheet.

The bearded man saluted and stopped his willing team. Rife did likewise. The woman spoke first. Her tongue was swift and slightly acid.

"You better turn round and follow us if you want to save your

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hair," she called. " Yesterday a sheep-herder told us he saw—"

A sharp word from the bearded man caused her to relapse into sullen silence. He asked Rife where he might be going, then climbed down to the trail and said he wanted to talk to him a little. The boy followed reluctantly behind his wagon. Nancy Belle could hear the bearded man's tones coming slow and grave like her father's, while the woman made silent and horribly expressive lip language.

Rife came back, walking stiffly.

The bearded man climbed up beside the woman. " They got to go on," he told her in a low voice, then saluted with his whip. " Good luck, boy! And you, miss! "

Rife raised his whip in stiff acknowledgment. The wagons creaked apart.

Nancy Belle saw in front of her the trail to the Rio Grande, little more than a pair of wheel tracks that lost itself on the lonely plain. Rife seemed relieved that she did not ask what the bearded man had said. But it was enough for her not to be able to forget the woman's fearful signs and mouthings and the horror in the curious eyes of the staring children.

Sister and brother talked very little. Nancy Belle saw her brother's eyes keep sweeping the country, scanning the horizons. Bunches of bear grass that might have been feathers pinioned his blue gaze, and clumps of can cactus that seemed to hold pointing gun barrels. At arroyos thick with chamiso and Apache-plume she could see his feet tighten on the footboard. Once he pulled out the rifle, but it was only a herd of antelope moving across the desert page.

They camped for the night when the sun was still high. Nancy Belle asked no questions as the boy drove far off the trail into a grassy hollow. She sang softly to herself as she fried the salt side bacon and put the black coffee-pot to boil.

Rife hobbled Anton Chico and the Bar X horse and staked out Fancy close to the wagon.

She pretended not to notice when, before dark, he poured earth on the fire till not a spark or wisp of smoke remained. Out of one eye she watched him climb the side of the hollow and stand long minutes sweeping the country from the ridge, a slight, tense figure against the sullen glow of the sunset.

" It's all right," he said when he came down. " You can go to bed."

" What's all right? " she asked him.

" The horses," he said, turning away, and Nancy Belle felt a stab of pain that so soon this boy must bear a man's responsibilities and tell a man's lies.

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She prayed silently on her blankets spread on the hay in the wagon box, and lay down with her head on the side-saddle, her unread Testament in her hand. She heard Rife unroll his camp bed on the ground beneath the wagon. It was all very strange and hushed without her father. Just to feel the Testament in her hand helped to calm her and to remember the day at the post when she had first met Stephen.

Her father had never let her come in contact with the men of the trail. Always, at the first sign of dust cloud on the horizon, he would tell both children to heap up the chip-box, fill the water-buckets, and carry saddles and bridles into the house. But this day Asa Putman and Rife had gone to Fort Sumner. And to Nancy Belle, Uncle Gideon could seldom say no.

It had been a very hot day. She had been sitting in the shade of the earthen bank of the tank, moving her bare feet in the cool water, watching the ripples in the hot south wind. The leaves of the cottonwoods clashed overhead, and she heard nothing until she looked up, and there was a young man on a blue-grey horse with dust clinging to his hat brim and moustache. His eyes were direct as an eagle's. Firm lines modelled his lean face. But what she noticed most at the time was the little bow tie on his dark shirt.

Instantly she had tucked her bare wet legs under her red dress. Her face burnt with shame, but the young stranger talked to her about her father coolly, as if she, a girl of fifteen, had not been caught barefooted. Then he did what in her mind was a noble thing. When Uncle Gideon came out, he magnificently turned his back for her to run into the house and pull on shoes and stockings.

She thought of Stephen constantly next day and the next. She had grown a little used to the journey without her father now—the still, uncertain nights under the wagon sheet, sitting, lying, listening, waiting; the less uncertain days with the sun on the endless spaces; her never-quiet perch on the high spring seat under the slanted bow; the bumps, creaks, and lumberings of the wagon; the sand sifting softly over the red, turning wheels; all afternoon the sun in their faces; ahead the far haze and heat waves in which were still lost Gunstock and the Rio Grande. Almost she had forgotten the bearded man with the oxen and the curious, detached horror in the eyes of his children.

Since morning of the third day their progress had been slower. The trail seemed level, except for the heavy breathing of the horses. But when Nancy Belle glanced back she could see the steady grade they had been climbing.

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Abruptly, in mid afternoon, she found that the long blue Espiritu Range had disappeared, vanished behind a high pine-clad hill which was its southernmost beginning. It was like the lizard that swallowed itself, a very real lizard. At this moment they were climbing over the lizard's tail.

" Cedars," Rife said briefly, pointing with the whip to dark sprawling growths ahead.

" You breathe deep up here." Nancy Belle drank in the light air.

Rife took a sniff, but his blue eyes never ceased to scan the high black-thatched hill under whose frowning cliff they must pass.

" Soon we can see the Gunstock Mountains," Nancy Belle said.

" And Martin Cross' cabin," Rife nodded. " It's the last water to the Rio Grande."

" He's a nice old man," Nancy Belle ventured casually. " It would be nice to camp by his cabin tonight and talk."

The boy inclined his head. After a few moments he started to whistle softly. At the first cedar Nancy Belle leapt off the moving wagon and climbed back with an evergreen branch. The twig, crushed in her hand, smelt like some store in Santa Fe.

They gained the summit. A breeze was sweeping here from the south-west, and the horses freshened. But Rife had suddenly stopped whistling and Nancy Belle's sprig of cedar lay on her lap. The frowning cliff of the pine-clad hill was still there. But Martin Cross' cabin had turned to a desolate mound of ashes. As they stared, a gust of wind sent wisps of smoke scurrying from the mound, and a red eye opened to watch them from the embers. Nancy Belle felt an uncontrollable twitching in the hair roots at the base of her scalp.

Where Martin Cross' eastbound wheel tracks met the trail, Rife reluctantly halted the horses and wet his air-dried lips.

" The water-keg's dry, and the horses. If Papa was here, he'd drive over."

" I'm the oldest." Nancy Belle found her voice steady. " I'll ride over. There might be something we can do."

The boy rose quickly. His eyes seemed to remember something his father had said.

" You can drive the wagon over if I wave."

He had thrown her the lines and slipped back through the canvas-covered tunnel of wagon box, picking up Fancy's bridle and the rifle. Barebacked he rode toward the smouldering ashes at the foot of that frowning hill. The chestnut mare's tail and mane streamed like something gold in the wind.

When she looked back to the trail, her eyes were pinioned by

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a light object in the wheel track ahead of the Bar X horse. It was a long grey feather. Instantly she told herself that it had come from some wild turkey Martin Cross had shot, and yet never had air anywhere become so suddenly horrible and choking as in this canyon.

Rife did not signal her to drive over. She saw him come riding back at full speed. The mare was snorting. As he stopped her at the wagon, her chestnut head kept turning back towards what had once been a cabin. Rife slipped the lead rope about her neck and climbed into the seat with the rifle in his hands.

"The water—you wouldn't want it!" he said thickly. His cheeks, she noticed, were ashen.

"Rife—" Nancy Belle touched his arm when she had driven down the canyon—"what did you see at the cabin?"

The boy sat deaf and rigid beside her, eyes staring straight ahead. She saw that his young hands were still tortured round the barrel of his rifle.

Far down on the pitch-dark plateau she stopped the horses in the trail and listened. There were no stars, not a sound but the flapping of the wagon sheet in the wind and the clank of coffee-pot and water-bucket under the wagon. Half standing on the foot-board, she guided the team off the trail in the intense blackness. Her swift hands helped the trembling boy stake out the mare and hobble the team. They did not light a lantern. Rife declined to eat. Nancy Belle chewed a few dry mouthfuls.

The wind came drawing out of the blackness. It hissed through the grass, sucked and tore at the wagon sheet, and whistled through the spokes and brake rigging. Rife did not take his bed-roll under the wagon tonight. He drew the ends of the wagon sheet together and lay down in the wagon box near his sister. For a long time they were silent. When she heard his heavy breathing, she lifted the rifle from his chest.

The storm grew. Sand began pelting against the canvas and sifted into the wagon box. An invisible cloud of choking dust found its way into eyes, mouth, ears, and lungs. Nancy Belle laid down the rifle a moment to pull a blanket over the face of the boy. He tossed and muttered pitifully, but he slept on.

Magically the rain, when it came, stopped the sand and dust. The girl drank in the clean-washed air. At daylight she slipped out. The plateau, stretching away in the early light touched here and there with feathers of mist, would have been beautiful except for a sharp new loneliness. The horses were gone!

At her exclamation, Rife appeared from the wagon box. His shame at having slept through the night was quickly over-shadowed by their misfortune.

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Together they found where Fancy's stake had been pulled out and dragged. Yards farther on they could tell by Anton Chico's tracks that his hobbles had parted.

Nancy Belle made her brother come back to the wagon and stuff his pockets with cold biscuits and antelope jerky. She said she would have a hot breakfast ready when he returned. The horses, perhaps, were just down in some draw where they had drifted with the wind.

When he had gone with the rifle, she filled the coffee-pot from a clearing waterhole in the nearest arroyo. She fried potatoes and onions in the long-handled skillet. And when he did not come, she set fresh biscuits in the Dutch oven. Each biscuit held a square of salt bacon in its top and, as it baked, the fat oozed down and encased it in a kind of glazed tastiness.

At noon she thought she heard a shot. Nowhere could she see him on the endless sweep of plateau. By late afternoon she was still alone. She read her Testament and wondered how many women over the world had read it in hours like this. Sitting in the shadow of the wagon, facing the direction in which he had gone, she looked up every few minutes. But all her eyes could find were cloud shadows racing across the lonely face of the plateau. All she could hear were the desolate cries from the unseen lark sparrows.

Darkness, stillness settled down on the empty land. She climbed back into the wagon and sat on the chuck-box, hands rigid on her knees. Again and again she convinced herself that the horses could not have been driven off or she would have seen the drivers' tracks.

When wild, sharp barks shattered the stillness and set wires jerking in her limbs, she talked to herself steadily, but a little meaninglessly, of the post—on and on as the darkness was filled with the ringing and counter-ringing of shrill, cracked yappings—not long tones like a dog's, but incredibly short syllables rising, rising, in a mad eternal scale and discord.

" I wish Papa had given me two of the chairs," she repeated. " Mamma said they were post oak from Texas. She said they had got white from scrubbing. I liked the laced rawhide seats with the hair left on. It made them soft to sit on. The seats in the parlour were black. And the ones in the kitchen were red. But I liked the brockle one in my room best."

The insane din round the wagon had become terrific. There were only two or three of the animals, Nancy Belle guessed, but they threw their voices and echoes together to make a score.

" When I was little, I liked to go in the storage-room," her voice went on, scarcely intelligible to her own ears. " It was dark and cool, and smelt of burlap and kerosene and whisky, and sweetish

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with brown sugar. I can see the fat sacks of green coffee. And the round tins of kerosene had boards on the side. The flour-sacks were printed: ROUGH AND READY in red letters. Mamma once used to make our underwear out of the sacking. I can smell the salt side bacon in the gunny sacks."

She could tell from the sounds that one of the animals was running insanely back and forth near the wagon tongue. She had never noticed before that they yelped both when breathing in and out. Suddenly came silence. It warned her. Instinctively she felt for the axe.

"Nancy Belle!" a boy's far, anxious voice called from the darkness.

She hallooed and leaned out over the tailboard. Three shadowy forms were coming across the plateau in the starlight. Never had horses looked so good.

"Were you scared?" Rife greeted. "Anything bother you?"

"Nothing," Nancy Belle said. "Just coyotes."

"I had to give Fancy her head after it got dark." He slid wearily to the ground. "She brought us straight back to the wagon."

Nancy Belle had wanted to put her arms around her brother. Now she hugged the mare instead. Rife ate fresh biscuits and a tin plate of cold potatoes. He drank several tin cups of coffee. Nancy Belle had slipped the oats-laden gunny-sack nosebags over the horses' heads.

"I had to walk halfway to the mountain," Rife said.

"Just help hitch up; then you can sleep all night," she promised.

It rained again heavily towards midnight. Flashes of lightning lit the drenched plain. For minutes at a time, quivering fingers of blue phosphorescence stood on the ears of the toiling horses. At dawn Nancy Belle still held the reins as the mud-splashed wagon crawled through a world bathed in early purple splendour.

Four days they had been crossing a hundred and seventy miles of desolate plain. Now the end waited in sight. To the west lay a land broken and tumbled by a mighty hand. Hill shouldered hill and range peered over range, all indescribably violet except where peaks tipped by the unseen sun were far-off flaming towers of copper.

It was a new land, her promised land, Stephen's land, Nancy Belle told herself, where nobody burnt cow chips, but snapping cedar and pine, where cold water ran in the wooded canyons, and the eye, weary of one flat circle the horizon round, had endless geometric designs to refresh the retina.

She sang softly as the wagon lumbered to the edge of a long

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shallow valley, brown and uninhabited, running north and south, and desolate except for a winding ribbon that was white with sky and narrowly bordered with green.

"Rife!" Nancy Belle cried. "The Rio Grande!"

An hour afterwards they pulled out of the sun into the shade of the long cottonwood forest. Nancy Belle wasn't singing now. Where she remembered wide sandbars glistening with sky and tracked by waterfowl, a chocolate-red flood rolled. Where had been the island, tops of tule and scrub willow swung to and fro with the current.

Anton Chico and the Bar X horse stopped of their own accord in the trail, ears pricked forward at the swirling brown wash. While Rife turned the three horses loose to graze, Nancy Belle silently fried bacon and made coffee. When she had washed skillet and tin dishes in the river, the boy had wired the wagon box to the brake rigging. Now he was tying securely one end of his rope to the centre of the coupling pole under the wagon. The other end she knew he would fasten to the inadequate upper horn of the side-saddle.

"I wouldn't mind the river if only I had my own saddle," he mourned.

They hitched up the team silently. Rife cinched the side-saddle on Fancy and straddled it, the single stirrup useless to a man. Nancy Belle climbed into the wagon and picked up the lines. The other bank looked as far away as the Espiritu Range from the post. She wanted to say something to her brother—some last word, in case they didn't make it. But all she did was cluck her tongue to the horses.

Gingerly, one slow foot at a time, the team moved down the trail into the water.

"Give 'em their heads," Rife called from the right rear.

Nancy Belle held a rein in each hand. The red channel water came to the wagon tongue, covered it, reached the horses' bellies. The team wanted to stop. Nancy Belle swung her whip, a stick tipped with a long rawhide lash. The wagon went on. The collars of both horses kept dipping, but never entirely out of sight. Still barely wading, the slow team reached the firmer footing of the island.

Two-thirds of the river still rolled in front of the wagon. The west bank did not seem to have grown much closer, but the east bank behind them had moved far away. The team had to be whipped into the violent current. The water churned white through the wagon wheels.

Suddenly both horses appeared to stumble and drop out of

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sight. Their heads came up wildly, spray blowing from their nostrils. The muddy water hid their legs, but by their bobbing motions Nancy Belle knew that they were swimming.

"Keep 'em pointed up the river," Rife shouted.

Already she felt the wagon floating. It swung downstream with the current; then Rife's rope from Fancy's saddle snubbed it. The team was snorting with every breath. The Bar X horse swam high in the water, his withers and part of his back out of the chocolate current. But all she could see of Anton Chico were his nose and ears.

Down between her ankles she saw water in the wagon box. She thought of the hemstitched sheets at the bottom of her trunk, the towels and pillowcases crocheted with shell lace. Her blue velvet corduroy dress was probably wet already, and all the print aprons with dust caps to match. River water couldn't hurt the little yellow cream-jug, sugar-bowl, and covered butter-dish that had been her mother's. And the gingham dresses could be washed. What worried her were her wedding dress and the keepsake box, especially the tintypes, one of which was Rife in a child's suit edged with black braid, his brand-new hat on his knee.

An older Rife was shouting something behind her now. She couldn't catch the words. Then she found what it was. The neck and withers of Anton Chico raised suddenly out of the water and both horses were scrambling up the steep bank below the ford. Only quick work with the lines saved the wagon from turning over. Safe and blowing on the high bank, the dripping horses shook themselves like puppies.

Nancy Belle couldn't go on until she had opened the trunk and appraised the damage. Rife unsaddled Fancy and drove on with the refreshed team. Behind his slight back in the wagon box, the girl changed to her blue velvet corduroy, which was hardly wet at all. Then she combed her hair and rolled into a cranny of her trunk the old felt hat that had been too large for her father.

A half dozen riders met the wagon some miles down the Gunstock Canyon. All of them, Nancy Belle noticed, carried guns. Stephen wore a new white shirt and a grey hat with curled brim she had not seen before. He stood in his stirrups and swung her down in front of him on the saddle, where he kissed her. She had never felt his lips press into such a straight line.

"Papa couldn't come," she said. "So Rife brought me."

She felt Stephen's rigid arm round her.

"We just got in from the Beaverhead ourselves."

"He means they never get any news out in the Beaverhead or he'd 'a' come further east to meet you!" Uncle Billy Williams put in. He had a lovable, squeaky voice. "The Apaches been

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breakin' loose again. Funny you didn't hear anything over in your country."

Nancy Belle gave him an inscrutable look with her grey eyes.

Uncle Billy pulled out his bandanna and blew his nose. "They got my old friend Judge Hower and his wife and kid in a buggy on the Upper Espiritu. The man that found what they did to 'em, they say, cried like a baby."

"That's all right, Uncle Billy," Stephen said in a gentle voice.

Nancy Belle glanced at Rife. Her brother's face looked grey, the eyes staring as when he had ridden in the late afternoon sunlight from the smoking ashes of Martin Cross' cabin.

Nearly fifty people, gathered in the big parlour upstairs at the hotel, greeted Nancy Belle. An old man whose young black eyes twinkled out of a bearded face said he was glad to see she had her "hair on straight." Rife stopped with the trunk before driving to the livery, and Stephen's mother showed Nancy Belle to a room to dress.

The guests stopped talking when she came into the parlour in her white wedding dress. Her basque came to a point in the front and back. It fitted like a glove. The silk underskirt came to her instep, and the ruffled overskirt to her knees. She had parted her hair from side to side and brushed the fringes down on her forehead. She felt very light-headed. The wagon still seemed to be jerking under her.

She glimpsed Rife gazing at her, a rapt expression in his reticent blue eyes. She was glad to see that he had brushed his hair. The brass swinging lamp had been lit and the dark woodwork of the parlour festooned with evergreen branches. White streamers from the wall met in a papier-mâché bell in one corner. She noticed two children peering eagerly from the dark hall.

Stephen came to her, very straight in a long coat and stand-up collar with a black tie. He led her up beneath the papier-mâché bell. In a sibilant, churchlike whisper, the Gunstock preacher made sure of her full name. Then he coughed and began the ceremony. He had a deep voice, but Nancy Belle didn't hear all of the service.

Her mind kept going back to a tall grave man in a lonely adobe post on the wide Santa Ana plain. And after she had said, "I do," her lips moved, but she was not praying for Stephen, her husband.

★ ★ ★

SOUP OPERA

The man who put the din in dinner took the rest out of restaurant.

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PRIDE OF THE PEACOCK

He was cock-a-hoop when he showed her the key

BY SID CHAPLIN

ONE FINE day he found her at the bottom of the garden. She had carried down the steps and was looking over the wall at the crooked old Jacobean house, or at what could be seen of it through the trees.

"What's the idea—spyin' out the land?"

"Creepin' up on me like that!" she accused. "You gave me a turn."

"What's the odds—it's not a crime, not now it isn't."

"It's so sad," she said. "All those weeds and everythin' runnin' wild. Ah was tryin' to see the terrace: remember how that old peacock used to strut along and spread her tail?"

"Ah remember how that other ould peacock sent the Father down for a couple of months for pinchin' a few shillins' worth of scrap timber," he said. "And it was a he, not a she."

"What was?"

"The peacock was a he; among birds it's the male that wears the finery."

"Well, Ah always thought they were the hens," she said. "Fancy a he-bird with all them bonny colours!"

"Like the Major," said Willy. "Always showin' off. Ridin' about on a big black mare and stuck up on the Bench. Do this an' do that! All the pride of a peacock."

"It's all dead and done with, Willy. Ah wish ye wouldn't upcast it."

"It's our day now," he said. "They're gone. But Ah'll niver forget the old Dad when he came out of gaol." He motioned at the red-brick monstrosity he'd built at the back of the Major's home. "That's the best bit o' work Ah ever did. But some day Ah'll git me own back—Ah'll take their house an' level it to the ground; then it'll be dead and done with."

She knew better than to argue with him. It didn't matter that the Major was dead, his children scattered, the house falling into ruin. Now his hatred was focused on the house. Vague though

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she was, she knew that his hatred took away something that belonged to her. And when the house was finally levelled, his hatred would focus on something else. So it was only natural that she in her turn should focus upon the house.

Her own house with its shiny furniture and gadgets was a prison, but the Major's house was the centre of a thousand dreams fed on vague memories of croquet and tea on the lawn, elegant women and lovely children, and the spread tail of the peacock shining like a jewel-crusted tapestry in the sun.

He was feeling the top of the wall with his capable builder's hands. "Who's to know or care if ye go in for a look?" he muttered.

"But it's private property."

Ignoring her protests, he went for a hammer and crowbar. Down came a coping-stone and the moss-cemented wall soon followed. "Git through."

She shook her head.

"Dinna be so soft!" he exploded.

"What if Ah'm caught?"

"You winnat," he said, and hustled her through the opening.

Seen at ground level, through a network of branches, the house threatened. The whorl of a bull's-eye in a windowpane flashed menacingly—as if God's eye burnt upon her. "Go on, lass. Make yourself free of it," he urged, but he made no attempt to follow.

"You come," she taunted.

"No, Ah'll stay here an' watch," he said, like a child.

She knew he was afraid. She stepped through long grass and came to a barrier of nettles, their musty odour warning her of danger.

"What's wrong now?"

"Ah'm frightened of being stung—nettles."

"Thresh 'em down; take that dead branch—that's right."

A man would have gone ahead and made a track, or taken her hand, or lifted her into his arms. But not he.

This had been the orchard. Now it was a wilderness of barren trees. And beyond was worse: the vegetable garden a sea of chickweed, the lawn invaded by an army of monkeytail, and there was no getting through the rose garden with its rampant entanglement of thorny creepers. The dry-wall terrace was wrecked and its walk littered with the glass of the conservatory. The great vine hung in dead, dry festoons. And the peacock had gone, leaving not a feather behind.

"What's it look like?" he asked, almost before she had time to climb back through the hole in the wall.

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" Oh, man, but it's a shame."

" In a mess, eh? "

" It's a shame; such a beautiful house."

" Nobody wants it now. Nobody to screw rents to keep it up. Full of damp. Riddled with dry rot. You watch—it'll come to me in the end."

" Come to you? "

" Why not? "

" But what good . . . ? "

" Smash it up," he said. " Strip it down, cart it away, sell it for scrap."

" Ah wish ye wouldn't—it'll end in bad luck," she pleaded. " Leave it alone; it's done ye no harm."

But it was no use. He was determined to avenge his father by taking spite on the house. So he waited, and six months later, when the house was put up for demolition, his was the highest bid.

He was cock-a-hoop when he showed her the key. " We's the Lord of the Manor now, eh? "

She turned away.

" What's got into ye? "

" That bonny house," she said. " It hangs over me . . ."

" It's better than winning the pools—money for jam. Snap out of it, lass. There'll be a fur coat or mebbe a bit o' jewellery in it for ye! "

" Ah wouldn't mind if ye weren't ventin' your spite," she suddenly flamed. " Just childishness—an' ye know your father asked for it."

He struck her then.

Afterwards he apologised. " Ah'm sorry, lass. It's got nothing to do wi' the Major; it's just a good bit o' business. An' Ah'll not touch a brick. Ah've fixed up an ould chap called Rainbird to do the job, he's a specialist." And, uneasily, all was well again.

But she mourned for the house. Often during the day, when Willy was out, she would sit at the bedroom window. The house behind the trees was like a huge grey cat at rest. But beyond the empty eyes of the windows there was life of some kind, she was sure, and it was wrong not to serve notice. Somebody should warn it, " Look out, they're after you, they'll pull you down! "

Already, before the wreckers had started, he was dividing the spoils. " Fifty quid for the banisters," he'd announce. Or, " Ah've got rid of the fireplace." Or, " They're cryin' out for the lead."

One night he awoke to find her standing at the window. " What's wrong, lass? "

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" Ah thought it was something screechin'."

" A vixen fox," he said. " Or mebbe a screech owl."

" It sounded like a peacock."

He laughed uneasily. " Ye've been dreamin'—it's ten years since they took it away." He led her back to bed.

" Yes, it was a screech owl," she murmured. " Must have been! "

But it had been the fierce, challenging cry of the peacock, calling the Major back to defend his own, rousing the house.

Next morning the wreckers arrived. There were two of them. They came in an ancient car with the tackle in a trailer.

Rainbird was a big old man. His hair was white and his face ruddy. He wore a corduroy waistcoat and a gold watchchain with a ruby fob, and had a silk scarf tucked into the neck of his grey flannel shirt. He wore a signet ring—a thing she disliked in men—but like the silk scarf it seemed right for him.

" Have a cup of tea," said Willy, " before ye take a look at it."

" Ah'm not puttin' the missus out any? "

" Why, man, she'll be glad," laughed Willy.

" It'll be all right if Ah call me lad in for a cup? "

" Why, naturally," said Willy.

" Ah was asking the mistress," said Rainbird courteously, but like all else it passed over Willy's head. The lad was about sixteen, tall and tongue-tied.

" Your grandson? " asked Willy.

" My son," said Rainbird.

" Well! " said Willy.

Without a shadow of a smile the old man said, " He's not the first, and ye never know, he mightn't be the last."

To take the lead Willy said, " Have a look at her, Rainbird. There's a mountain of good stuff for ye, eh? "

" It's a pity she's got to come down," said the old man. " She's a jewel. Far better pull this 'un down and live in the old house. Might do ye a bit good." Her heart leapt.

" But the rates, man," cried Willy. " It'd take a fortune."

" She's worth it," said Rainbird, towering over Willy, and glancing at the woman.

" Well, Ah'll be jiggered! " exclaimed Willy. " You're a bonny funny character, arguing yourself out of a job an' all." She was glad he'd missed the point, the look, and the way she'd blushed.

Whatever his feelings, the old man knew his work. Every day there was a load of stuff for the lorries.

They gutted the interior of timber and fittings; pulled out the

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fireplaces—beautiful mellow stone—with a block and pulley; made the place a shell before they started on the roof and walls. But she never watched them; only heard the sound of their work—the hammering and knocking—become more and more hollow until at last the grave slow tones of the man and the laughter of the boy echoed uninterrupted to the roofbeams.

The boy laughed constantly when alone with Rainbird; with her he was silent and reserved. But she often caught him looking at her. This was when they came, every day at noon, to fill their tea cans and eat their sandwiches. And one day she said, "What a quiet lad!"

"Only with you, mistress," said Rainbird. "Woman's a mystery to him—his mother died after he was born."

"Ah'm sorry," she said.

"She was a happy woman," he said.

She wanted to ask why, but didn't dare, and he knew that the question was on the tip of her tongue.

He smiled. "Why, she was loved," he said. "Two wives Ah've had, and two Ah've loved. They knew where they were, y'see. A woman needs a kindly, masterful hand."

"It wouldn't do for me!" she fired, annoyed by his calm arrogance.

"Well now, ye wouldn't know until ye'd tried it," he said with a smile. And she knew he was thinking of Willy, who was strong only in his hatreds, and flounced out of the room.

That night she heard again the harsh cry of the peacock. But it was too late, the house was almost levelled to the ground. Tomorrow would see the end. She wondered if she would miss the old man, with his gentle assured voice, his easy command of all things—and herself.

She went into an uneasy sleep and dreamt that the quiet boy came laughing to her. "Watch him!" he cried.

The following day Willy was having his dinner when she heard a shout from the boy. Running to the window, she saw Rainbird on his knees looking at something while the boy danced and shouted through funnelled hands.

"Something's happened down there," she said.

Willy joined her at the window. "By gum, they've come across something," he said. Without bothering to put on his jacket, he ran out.

For the first time since the day Willy had knocked down the wall, she went to where the house had stood.

"What is it?" she cried.

"Money!" said Willy, looking up. "Old coins. Hundreds of 'em."

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"Hid under the hearthstone," said Rainbird. 'Mebbe centuries ago."

"Worth a bit, Ah'll bet," said Willy greedily. He was scratching one with his pocket knife. "By gum, it looks like silver," he said. There was a fine white dust and it concealed hundreds of the wafer-thin, misshapen treasure. They counted three hundred and forty-two.

"Hid during the Civil War or some other troubles," said Rainbird. His eyes were twinkling.

"Ah'll take them to a pal of mine in town," said Willy. "Get them valued." He ran back to the house and returned with a briefcase.

"But, Willy," she protested. "They belong to the Major's family."

"Eh, but ye're kiddin'," he said exultantly. "Everythin's mine."

"By right, though," she said. "By proper right, they're not yours."

"You make me sick," said Willy. "Never knew a woman with so many sentimental ideas. You tell her, Rainbird; Ah'm off to town." He raced away with the case under his arm.

"D'ye think it's right?" she asked.

"He bought the lot."

"But all that money! Somebody hid it away for the family. It's not right that Willy should take it."

"It's not worth more than a few pounds," he said.

"But—why didn't you tell him, instead of letting him make a fool of himself?"

"He didn't ask," said Rainbird.

"Makin' a fool of himself for nothing!" she said.

"If it had been gold, he'd still have made a fool of himself," said Rainbird.

She went back to the house without answering.

Later in the afternoon they passed through the garden with the gear. It was their last day. The work was finished and Willy had paid their wages.

She scrubbed and dusted—anything to keep busy—and wished that Willy would return.

But he didn't return, and at four in the afternoon came the knock she dreaded at the kitchen door.

"Come in," she said.

"Ah'll not bother," said Rainbird.

"What is it ye want?"

"Just to say ye can come if ye want."

"You've got a nerve!"

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" Ah'll build ye such a house as ye've known."

" Well, there's one thing certain," she cried. " We'll not need a peacock in the garden while you're around! " Then her hand went to her throat as she realised what it was she had revealed.

She took nothing with her but the clothes she stood in, reported the village gossips who sympathised with Willy. But their sympathy was wasted. She had found the pride of her life; and Willy had somebody else to hate. © Sid Chaplin 1960

★ ★ ★

ADDITION AND DISTRACTION—

Yesterday we dined with the Duke and Duchess of Somerset, and it was my fortune to sit by the Duke, and not far from the Duchess. His Grace was exceedingly talkative and agreeable until he had finished his dinner, when the most invincible fit of drowsiness seized him, a usual thing, no doubt, for his wife immediately leant over to me, and said: " Pray talk to the Duke and don't let him go to sleep." So on I floundered, every now and then getting an unmeaning smile, with closed eyes; but the moment I ceased, the Duchess would urge me to " talk on, ask questions, talk mathematics! " Think of that? " Ask him," she said, " what was the problem he was solving this morning."

Imagine me talking mathematics to a stupid, dosing old duke, who, if he had been wide-awake, had not a dozen ideas. Finding myself unequal to the task imposed on me, I spoke to Madam Rothschild (the great banker's widow), behind the Duke's chair, and said: " For Heaven's sake help me to keep the Duke awake! " She kindly lent her aid and we talked at him with all our might; but it would not do. He gave audible signs that he had quit us and mathematics for the land of dreams . . .

Letter from Mrs. Sallie Coles Stevenson, February 1840

—ARITHMETICAL PROGRESSION

Dorothea had little patience with a teacher who complained of overwork. One of these came to her once, hoping to have the task of corrections lightened. " You say," said Miss Beale, " you take six minutes over each of these forty geometry books: three minutes is ample. Now that will reduce the time by two hours." Another mathematics teacher, who was leaving to be married, came to the Principal to say how sorry she was that she could not finish correcting a batch of papers before she left. " Take them on your honeymoon, dear," said Dorothea, " they will give you something to do."

JOSEPHINE KAMM, *How Different From Us*

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I don't want her, you can have her,
She's too fat for me . . .

The human waistline will succumb
To such and such a diet.
The ladies gnaw
At carrots raw,
Their husbands will not try it.

Though excess flesh can be removed
We're told, by this and that,
You cannot win,
The thin stay thin,
The fat continue fat.

OGDEN NASH, *Just a Leaf of Lettuce*

Proof of the Pudding

Lady X was funnier than I'd ever known her —she got me to encourage her in venturing on a 'rich' pudding—and then said, "Now dear Mr. Eddie, I *know* I can trust you to tell me the exact truth, look at my face, is that too fat! Look at my neck, *look at the back of my neck*, is that?" etc. etc. Then she burst out, "Do you know what I'd really like to do? Give up trying to look pretty, trying to make people like me, and live at home with a wonderful cook, and just eat and *eat* and EAT, and then have a box at the opera and sit in it like a kind of porpoise and then go home and have a wonderful supper!"

CHRISTOPHER HASSALL, *Edward Marsh, A Biography*

Who loves rich food and cooks it
Looks it.

HELEN CASTLE

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the FIRE

Stops and Stays

How hard is the fortune of all womankind!
They're always controlled and always confined . . .

American Ballad, The Wagoner's Lad

Let Good Digestion . . .

Then [the headman] nodded again and drew something from his bosom and put it on his head. "Look," he said. "Pretty."

It was a beret of pillar-box red. Through the stupor that was slowly mounting and encompassing his mind Basil recognised it. Prudence had worn it jauntily on the side of her head . . . He shook the old fellow roughly by the shoulder.

"Where did you get that?"

"Pretty."

"Where did you get it?"

"Pretty hat. It came in the great bird. The white woman wore it. On her head like this." He giggled weakly and pulled it askew over his glistening pate.

"But the white woman. Where is she?"

But the headman was lapsing into coma . . . then a flicker of consciousness revived in him. He raised his head. "The white woman? Why, here," he patted his distended paunch. "You and I and the big chiefs—we have just eaten her."

Then he fell forward in a sound sleep.

EVELYN WAUGH, *Black Mischief*

. . . Wait on Appetite

The daughter of the farrier
Could get no one to marry 'er,
Because she said she wouldn't wed
A man who couldn't carry 'er.

ANON

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THE MIRROR ROOM

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

Paul and I were identical twins : so alike we could even take out each other's girls and get away with it. Our careers differed: Paul, a research scientist at a rocket station ; I, in my last year at hospital—where Paul rang to ask me to stand in for him and meet his girlfriend, Lydia. Lydia thought I was Paul, and took me to their sinister contact, Bertil. I realised with horror that Paul had been

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passing top-secret rocket data to Bertil and taking money in return. I realised too that I, Hugh, was falling in love with Lydia.

I went to a Colonel in M.I.5 who took over, and asked me to impersonate Paul who had vanished—perhaps to Berlin. The Colonel sent me to Paul's flat to wait until Bertil came to track me down . . .

The doorbell rang. It was Lydia. Bertil had threatened that unless she made Paul give him full information the lives of her parents in East Berlin would be in danger. . . As I listened, I found courage to tell her the truth—that I was Hugh not Paul. We knew now that we faced the same dangers. . . We knew also that we were in love.

Bertil forced us both to leave with him for Berlin. To go with him was our only hope of tracing Paul, of bringing out Lydia's parents. Before we crossed, I managed to leave a message for the Colonel.

En route to Berlin, Bertil's car crashed, and he lay unconscious. Lydia and I got a lift in a British lorry.

Trying to trace Paul, we visited the Berlin night spots where he might be. At the Sombrero we were at last on his trail. The manager thought I was Paul.

I STOOD for a moment in the neon glare outside the Sombrero nightclub in Berlin, and stared back at the manager who had just refused entrance to Lydia and me: the man who thought I was my brother. I could guess what state he would expect Paul to be in, and I passed my hand across my forehead and said, " Sorry. I've been on a bit of a jag . . . Don't remember very much. Was it last night? Tell me the worst."

He looked at his watch. " No, sir—this morning. At four o'clock to be precise. You may recall that you ordered a bottle of champagne for which you could not pay. Then you tried to assault one of our lady hostesses, and when we remonstrated with you—most politely, of course—I regret to say you upset your table and broke several glasses. I have your bill here, which you signed. Do I understand that you now wish to settle the account? "

He produced a bill. I imagine the account was as straight as a corkscrew, but I paid it quickly; for on the bottom was the thing I had wanted to see: Paul's signature. And beneath that—something I had hardly dared hope for—an address.

Once more, we stood outside in the fresh air. I remember looking up at the bright lights, then down at the scrap of paper that was in my hand. " We'll go to the Colonel's contact at the Maüse Turm first," I said. " If Paul is still at this address we'll find him there later."

I remembered something I heard once about the war: it was from the head of the military police in Alexandria.

He had said that if you want to catch someone on the run, the nearer towards dawn that you do it, the better. Sleep . . . rest, counts more than anything then. Then they go to their holes—and that is when you find them. Paul would do the same now.

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And the later we went, the more likely Paul was to be there.

" And if he is—? "

" I don't know. We'll have to try to talk to him."

The Maüse Turm was quite different from all those dumps we had been in before. It was clean, fresh, and the music that was coming from a loudspeaker behind the bar was pleasant and subdued. There were not many people; about a dozen couples were having supper, but the stools at the bar were empty. It was like a doll's house; the front brilliantly lit, the inside gay with niches, where concealed lighting displayed dolls in the vivid peasant dresses of various nationalities. The rest of the decor was in deep purple and gold. The whole was in good taste; so different from the clip-joints we had sampled earlier.

We pulled out two stools and sat down. I rested my elbows on the brass rail at the top of the counter, looking behind it, trying to think what I had been told to do. " Opal "—the code word—that was easy; but the old girl, the Colonel had told me about, who pretended she couldn't speak English unless she was alone, was more difficult. I could not see anyone serving the drinks who qualified.

Behind the bar were a teenager and a middle-aged woman who looked drab and apathetic and had some kind of nervous twitch that kept a tremor in her hands and one side of her face. She couldn't be called an old woman, but as I looked at her I realised what wonderful cover she might be. No expression would ever betray a face of which one side was never still.

" Sprechen-Sie Englisch? "

" Nein, mein Herr."

" I do, sir." The teenager came forward. " What do you want? "

I asked for two brandies and noticed that when she heard the order, the older woman motioned the girl away and poured the drinks herself. As she pushed the two glasses towards us—not spilling a drop, even with that tremble—her head came very close to mine. I breathed the one word: " Opal."

She did not answer. She gave no sign that she had heard. But a few moments later she said something softly in German to the girl and then disappeared from behind the counter. Lydia and I sat sipping our drinks, listening to the music that came from the loudspeakers twenty-four hours a day over the Berlin network.

I was jerked back to the present when the girl came over to speak to me. " Would you like to park your coat, sir? There is a rack behind that curtain." She pointed to some heavy drapes of purple velvet in one corner. " It will be quite safe."

It wasn't a suggestion. It was, by tone, a request. I said to Lydia, " Excuse me a moment, it's hot in here. I think I will." I slid off my stool and walked over. When I had pushed the curtains aside and gone through, the old woman was waiting for me.

" Opal," she said. " Yes? " The English accent was good.

We moved down the dingy passage that contained the cloak-rooms. From the far end came a smell of cooking, the clatter of

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pots and pans. "I was warned you might come," she said. "What is it you want? Quickly!"

"First, a message. Can you get one back?" She nodded.

"Say that I have located him, but not actually made contact. I'm going to try to do that now. Then I must have money—about three thousand marks." I hesitated while I worked out the probable cost of five air fares to England. "Last, have you a safe place where someone can lie up?"

"Until you can get him out of the country? Yes. Bring him here, but as late as possible: in the early hours, just before we close, if you can. And I will send your message. Hang your coat up there and I will put the money in the pocket. Give me about ten minutes."

I hung up my coat, and went back through the curtain to Lydia. "Just the other half," I said softly. "And then we'll go." The young girl served us and we sipped, waiting.

The older one came back behind the bar, still trembling, still twitching. She made no sign to me, but I knew she had done what she said, and the money would be there. We finished our drinks, said good-bye, and then went out into the cool night air.

The throb of the city was dying now but the lights were still flashing and turning in every shade of neon colour. We stopped under one of them, and I pulled out a wad of money that had been thrust deep into the pocket of my coat. Then I fished out the bill from the nightclub, peering, in the flickering glare. "Kemperplatz," I said. "Any idea where it is?"

Lydia shook her head.

We walked a little down the Ku'damm, and then hailed a prowling taxi. It was a shock to learn from the driver that the Kemperplatz was a long way off, on the borders of the Eastern sector.

"Go there." I just looked at Lydia; there was no need to comment.

It was a long drive: back down the whole length of the Ku'damm, past the Memorial Church, and into the strange contrast of the gloom of carefully levelled bomb-sites and floodlit blocks of stores and hotels that rose like glittering islands amidst them. A turn, and we were back again among rows of houses, shabbier than those in the centre of the city but still with street lights, still a sense of aliveness.

Then, as we turned into a wide square, to the east there was nothing but darkness. No light from the street or even from a moving car; as if a knife had cut off the living from the dead. It could almost be felt: cold, drab, chilling miles of ruins where no effort had been made to bring them to life again. No need for barbed wire to show the boundary between East and West.

The taxi stopped outside a small and shabby hotel. I squeezed Lydia's hand, murmured, "Well—here goes!"

There was a small dim hall, a counter on one side for the porter, an old man with steel spectacles perched on the end of his nose.

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He was in shirtsleeves, celluloid protectors covering the cuffs. "No women in your room. I've told you that before, Herr Armitage." He had hardly bothered to raise his eyes from his newspaper. Then a sudden thought struck him.

He swung round to look at the board behind him, at the rows of hooks that carried keys. He turned back to stare at me. "But you came in two hours ago! I gave you the key myself."

There was no one else around; I preferred bought time to long explanations. I slid a banknote across. "He is still in," I said. "I am his brother. I have come to take him away."

"There is a bill outstanding. I have instructions— "

"I'll pay that, too, before he leaves. Now all I want you to do is to let us in with your pass-key." I pushed the note a little farther in his direction. "He has probably locked himself in."

The note disappeared into the old porter's horny hand. "Quick then, Number 56. I will take you up in the lift. But he is difficult, Herr Armitage—violent sometimes. There must be no noise. And the bill must be paid."

He took us up in the lift and along a passage, stopping at a door with the number 56, putting his ear to the keyhole, listening. I wondered how many times he had done that. "There's no sound."

"Open it up." He turned his key very gently and left the door ajar. Lydia and I stepped softly inside.

Paul was lying on the bed, flat on his back, arms outstretched, so still that for a moment I thought he was dead. An empty, evil-smelling bottle lay on the carpet. There was a horrible stuffiness in the room, and over that the thin sour odour of fear. His breathing was so slight that scarcely a movement of his body was visible, and as I lifted an eyelid to see his pupil reaction, I called to Lydia, "Hospital—that's where they can fix this."

"A drunk like that? They'd throw him out on his ear. Then where would we be?"

"Coffee!" I turned to the porter who still stood at the door. "Coffee! Jugs of it, strong and black." I produced another banknote. "Quickly—and keep your mouth shut."

"Ja, mein Herr." He shut the door and I heard his feet padding away down the passage.

That little room, it was like a mirror room at a fair; the haunted look of my own face was beside me all the time now, with a day's stubble, and a sucked-in expression of exhaustion coupled with alcoholic poisoning.

Wet towels, face-slapping, walking him up and down: that was my memory of that little room. Paul was the mirror of what I might have been if some small thing had gone wrong with me; some tiny fault in the complex machinery of the brain. It was without affection, with the disinterest of a doctor, that I noticed the first signs of recognition. He knew *me* first.

"Hullo, Hugh. In—at the—death. I—" He couldn't go on.

Then came Lydia. "Hullo, poppet. So Hugh—dear, safe old

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Hugh has brought you along to hold—my—hand." Another spasm of retching, and then, " You're too close to things you don't understand, Lydia. You'll get—your—tail singed. Why—did—you come? To hold dear brother Hugh's hand?"

" Shut up," I said.

We got him back eventually; at least, from a drugged half-living to an exhausted sleep. We sat and watched. I was on the floor, Lydia on the one chair, while he relaxed and the muscles lost their tension, and the face faded back into the one I had always known. Mine—when I was tired to death, and had no friends, no help. Perhaps, sometimes, I had looked like that myself, and the only feeling I had now was of pity. For help, I turned to Lydia.

She sat in that one chair, watching him, while the light of the single bulb faded in the greying of the coming dawn. " Let him sleep, Hugh. Let him find his own time to wake."

I took her hand, and she was cold. We sat side by side, just watching, while daylight came . . .

Paul drifted back, uneasy, muttering. Then he sat up, swinging his legs to the floor, holding his head in his hands, groaning. At last he looked up and saw us.

" God," he said, " I feel awful." Then, trying to grin—that impudent, boyish grin I knew so well, that didn't come off now—" So you *were* here. It wasn't a dream. What the hell do you think you're doing here? "

I spoke first. " We've come to take you home, Paul."

" Home . . . where the hell do you think home is for me? I've no home now."

Lydia's voice cut in softly, breaking the bitterness of what had been said. " We know everything that has happened, Paul, every little bit of it. We came to help. That's all."

" Help? From you? That's good! Who got me into this mess? "

I said, " Shut up! You didn't get pushed into anything except for money. Lydia couldn't help what she— "

" So, she has a champion. How nice for you, Lydia! Only he doesn't know anything that would be of use to your chums. He's only a poor up-and-coming doctor to be."

" Listen, Paul. We've come to help you. Not to hold an inquest."

" Sorry—I feel bloody." He knuckled his hands into his eyes. " You wouldn't happen to have a drink on you, I suppose? "

" No, I haven't."

A long silence while he sat hunched in the same position. Then he looked at us. " You two know everything. Who else does? "

It had to come. " M.I.5."

" Then do you think I'm going to stick my head in a noose? No, thank you. I'd rather go where I'm more likely to be appreciated."

" How long for? " I was looking at him steadily. " All they are after are the few facts, you know. When you have spilt the beans, they'll drop you. And then what? You see, I don't believe you murdered that girl and I'm sure you can prove your innocence."

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"That's mighty trusting of you, Hugh. As a matter of fact, I didn't kill her. Found her dead in the flat when I went in."

"We know you didn't. Bertil did. And the police think the same, we believe. It wouldn't be difficult to prove your innocence." It was Lydia again; quiet, matter of fact.

"You can say that?" He looked at her, almost unbelieving. "You can take a lot, can't you?" He tried to touch her lightly, but she moved away.

He turned to look at me. "What about the other part?"

"I can't make a definite bargain, Paul. But if you come back with us, and tell them everything you know—contacts, things like that, I think I can promise you will be let off lightly."

"No case?" I saw a gleam of hope kindle, then die. He had seen my face, and it was no use trying to fool him.

I shook my head. "Not quite. But if you pleaded guilty, it would be hushed up as much as possible, and you might get two years."

Another long pause while he bowed his head. "That's generous. I think I'll take it— If you can get me a drink now, and let me have a bit of money later. I seem to have pawned nearly everything that was pawnable. I'd like to get those few things back."

Lydia got up slowly. "I'll get something. Brandy, Paul?"

He just nodded.

She went, and came back in ten minutes with half a flask of it. He took it from her without a word, gulped . . . gulped again; you could almost see the blood beginning to move inside him. Then he stood up for the first time to face us. "I think I'll get shaved," he said. "I don't look fit to be seen in respectable company . . ."

At last he was ready. The hands of my watch were well beyond the six o'clock closing-hour of the Maüse Turm by then, but if they were expecting us, I didn't think it mattered.

"Can I have that money now, Hugh, to get my things out of pawn?"

"They won't be open yet. Even in this all-night town. I'll give it to you later—or go and get them myself. We want you to come with us somewhere else—a safe place for a few hours."

He stared at me. "I want it *now*. If you don't mind."

"All right. How much?"

He said three hundred would be enough, and I handed the notes over. "Now lead me on the first stage to gaol," was all the thanks I got.

We went down to the reception and I paid his bill; then out into the cool freshness of the morning air. Paul sniffed it like a dog, hungrily. The wide Kemperplatz was gleaming from its early morning wash-down; the roadway shone with it in the slanting rays of the red ball of the sun that was rising in the east. And in that direction, now I saw it for the first time in daylight, the division, the clean cut was worse than it had seemed in the contrast of light and dark the night before.

The barbed wire was there. Down a short street I could see

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another square, the striped huts of the frontier guards, the gaunt tower that reared, facing away from us, and which I remembered having been told carried at the top a moving strip of lighted letters —like an advertisement—that faced out towards the wilderness. Only it did not try to sell any wares except the truth in the news. Anyone in the jungle who faced that way could see it. Phones can be tapped, radios jammed, but no one can stop or detect a pair of eyes that stare in a certain direction.

Beyond all that . . . a jungle. Acres and acres, as far as the eye could range . . . ruins. Weed-covered, part-blackened husks of buildings, that had once been great, were now cold, empty, with broken windows outlined as blind eyes. Nothing seemed to move, nothing seemed to be alive. You could almost smell the festering decay of it from that distance. And I would have to go there, as I had promised, to get two old people out and then see that they were looked after. But Paul must be left in safe hands, and kept there, before I could do anything about it.

I turned to speak to him, but he was still staring in the same direction. He gave another deep breath, hitched his sling-bag a little more firmly on his shoulder, and then swung his head to give me one of those slow smiles.

"Sorry, old man," he said, "I've changed my mind. I don't think I could face your offer. Thanks for the money. It will see me through until I make a contact and a date with Bertil. Look after yourselves. You'll make a good pair." Then he turned and started running—fast—in long loping strides down the street that led to the frontier exit.

It was sudden. I had been so sure he had given in that I just stood staring stupidly after him. Lydia brought me back to my senses. "Come on, Hugh. We've *got* to stop him!"

We ran, but he had the advantage of a thirty-yard start. We wasted time in futile shouting, and only lost more ground. It made no difference to the flying figure, only sent the pigeons wheeling up in the air from their roosting places.

The American guards turned their heads, but took no more notice. By the time we were within speaking distance of them, and had slowed to a walk, he was through—across the ten yards of no-man's-land, and the green uniforms were round him at the other barricade.

"Paul!" It seemed so futile to shout over that distance of muddy road, a space over which you could have thrown a ball.

"What do you want, bud?" An American Top-Sergeant was holding my elbow.

"That's my brother. He's drunk. He doesn't really want to go over there. He shouldn't—" What else could I say?

"He seemed to want to, in a hurry. And his papers were in order. Got a passport yourself?"

"Yes."

"Then you can go and fish him out if you want to. It's a free country—or isn't it?" He was screwing up his eyes as he looked

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into the sun towards where Paul was standing. "I only hope you're as friendly with those sons-of-bitches as he seems to be."

It was true. As I looked, he was starting to move away. "I'm going after him," I said.

"Please yourself, bud."

"Paul!" I shouted desperately. He heard, for he turned and raised his arm in a sort of mock salute.

I took a step towards the barrier, and then jerked to a halt. It was Lydia, behind me, her fingers biting into my arms like clamps as she held me back. I would not have believed she could be so strong.

"No! You'll never get back either! If Bertil—anyone else who *knows*—sees you both together, the whole thing will be finished. Do you want me to lose all I've got?"

I stayed still, watching the figure of my brother get smaller and smaller until it vanished among the ruins. We turned away and started walking up the road from the frontier.

"I've got to bring him back, Lydia. I'm not giving up now."

"We've got to! He's rotten, Hugh. Your brother is rotten, right the way through. And you—" She had stopped again and was facing me, her eyes full of tears, her face very close—"You are different. I believe it. You cannot throw the good side of the mirror away for the dirty tarnished back. For my sake, at least . . .

"Hugh, I'm *not* going to lose you. I will help you in all that you do, but I am not going to lose you. You matter too much to me now. You know I love you."

I suppose it would take another woman to understand why Lydia picked that moment to speak the words I had so much wanted to hear.

I just looked at her and said, "What do we do?"

"Go back and try to get into the Maüse Turm. The old woman will help."

The old woman listened to the whole tale from beginning to end, sitting, strangely incongruous, in the stale atmosphere of the gold and purple bar, where a slant of daylight came in through a chink in the drawn curtains. She was in a bright blue dressing-gown, her hair in curlers.

She heard us through to the end, with patience and attention. She must have known a lot of it, but not all. When I had finished, she sat for a moment, thinking.

"There is nothing one can do for a mad, sick dog like that. There is no way for anyone to win him back."

"I'm going to try to find him."

She shrugged. "Then there is only one possible way. Go in as a tourist, by car."

"But it might take days. It was only by a miracle that I traced him so quickly here in the West. And if he makes his contact at once, then it's hopeless."

"I think from what you have told me he will hesitate again. He

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is a coward, you see. He will put it off, as he did here. And three hundred West marks will last a long time on that side."

"You can't just go trailing round in a taxi for ever."

"No. That would be stupid. But you must remember that it is a dead city; anything outside their normal life will be noted, whispered about.

"I have the very man to take you—one who has underground contacts everywhere. If there is anything to find out, he will do it, and quickly. He is trustworthy. He has a taxi. He does a lot of business between the Zones. And he hates the régime of the East: he used to live there."

"How soon can you get him?"

"Within half an hour. Now I will make you some coffee."

She went towards the entrance to the kitchen and turned with her hand on the curtain. "There is one thing I should tell you. We have had news about your car crash. The wreck has been found, but not your friend Bertil."

"Where has he—?"

She cut me short with a jerk of her head towards the East. "Where else? It would be a pity if he found you."

"We'll have to risk that," I said grimly.

She came back soon with a steaming jug of black coffee, also a bottle of white tablets. "You have had so little sleep," she said. "Take one when you feel the tiredness coming on." I took them gratefully.

The driver arrived and we were introduced. His name was Hans Koln; he spoke perfect English, and I liked the look of him.

"We go now," he said. "You are two English tourists who wish to make a tour of the Eastern Sector. You have your passports and money? Good. But don't flash those West marks about too freely. They love them over there, but they are not supposed to have them. We will stop at a fruit shop before we go inside and get something better."

"A fruit shop?"

"Yes. We buy a lot of lemons. They are unobtainable there. They make a very fine form of currency."

We stopped at a shop at the far end of the Ku'damm and I gave him the money for the purchase. He came back to the car, staggering under the weight of a parcel the size of a small sack. "If you would not mind getting out of the back for a minute," he said, "I will put them under the seat. The frontier police are sometimes inquisitive."

He asked the way Paul had gone in earlier, and said it would be better to go by another route. We cut across to the Victory Column, then down the broad avenue leading through the Tiergarten, the park from which all the old trees had gone with the bombing, but now beginning to flourish again with replanted saplings. Then ahead, the warning sign:

ACHTUNG! SIE VERLASSEN NACH 70 M. WEST-BERLIN

Behind it, the scarred mass of the Brandenburg Gate, with the

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Red flag, the hammer and sickle, flying proudly from the top of it.

As we passed beneath, I shivered. Lydia must have noticed. She put her hand over mine, holding it tightly.

The few yards of no-man's-land, another barrier, and the rifles and dark green uniforms of the Eastern police. They were polite and cursory in their examination, hardly bothering to look at our passports. A few moments, a wave of an arm, and then we moved forward into the desolation and the unknown.

It was more terrifying when you were inside. There was hardly any traffic. The little transport that we did see was as old and battered as the wrecks of buildings on each side. Grey cragged walls sagging . . . the gutted shells of roofless buildings, still blackened by fire . . . open weed-covered spaces dotted with crazy shacks that had been knocked together from rusty corrugated iron and fragments of timber. They looked like the dreary magnification of those allotments you see beside railway lines in England. But the huts were not toolsheds; there were curtains at the windows. People lived in them.

Again and again I noticed the same poster on telegraph poles and walls. I asked Hans what it was.

"Rats," he said. "Warnings against rats . . .

"I am taking you on the ordinary tourist route," he explained. "It is safer and easier for me to cut off now and then to make inquiries at places I know. This brother of yours—what does he look like?"

"The same as me. He is my twin."

"Good. Then he will be easy to recognise. I think it will be wise if only I go in to start with. Just stay in the car. And the photo on your passport will be good enough for anyone who might have seen him. Will you lend it to me, please?"

I passed it over, and he turned off the main road into a narrower street in which there were a few shops. He stopped the car and stuffed a few of the lemons in his pocket. "I shall not be long, I hope." He walked over to a decrepit place, a second-hand clothing shop by the look of it.

We sat and waited. Some people passed us on foot, all apparently in a hurry. They were poorly dressed—and there was something else, something I had noticed in all the other faces since we crossed the border. Nobody smiled.

Hans came out, shaking his head, and we drove on to the next of his contacts. This one was a grocer's shop, the next a private house, the next a butcher's. All received their quota of lemons, all produced the same answer after his brief visit: the shake of the head that meant no.

And then, outside a café, there was no shake of the head. Hans walked back to the car, and I knew he was on to something by the way he walked.

"I think I have found something. But we have to be very careful. My friend, the proprietor, is worried. He thinks that one man in the bar is an informer. I have asked him to get us a

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sandwich ready in the back room where we can talk. We will have a drink in the bar first—it looks more natural. But don't say anything till we are alone."

We followed him in, and it was as dark and dreary and cold as I had expected. A dozen men were sitting at plain scrubbed tables, drinking a weak-looking beer. There was no laughter. When they spoke, their voices were hushed, and the words seemed to come from the corners of their mouths. There was almost a furtive, backward glance to see who was listening.

We were introduced as British tourists, and stood at the bar sipping a vile methylated schnapps. Making slow, laboured conversation with the landlord, I watched him as he leaned his elbows on the counter. He was a short plump man, with a bald head, a pale face, and a dirty apron tied round his middle. His eyes were constantly leaving mine, flicking over my shoulder to someone beyond, changing quickly from polite attention to something quite different. Once when it happened I turned quickly, making a pretence of coughing into my hand. I met the gaze of a man who sat alone in a corner, away from the others. Instantly, he dropped his eyes.

A woman from the back room spoke to the landlord.

"Your sandwiches are ready, sir," he said, and came round from behind the bar and opened the door for us. "I will be with you in a few minutes."

Lydia and Hans and I sat and munched the garlic sausage and grey rye bread. I was thinking hard. I had expected an atmosphere of fear and mistrust in a police state. But hadn't there been something more than that, out in the bar? Was there some message in the exchange of glances between the landlord and the man in the corner?

"Tell me," I asked Hans, "why did we have to come in here?"

"My friend daren't talk outside. But I'm certain he knows something. He'll be with us in a minute."

"How good a friend is he?"

"Trustworthy—as much as any of the ones I know over here. It is difficult for them sometimes. There is always a pressure the other way."

"And sometimes the pressure can get too strong?"

Before Hans could reply, the landlord came in. He ignored Lydia and me, and stared straight at Hans. A soft flow of German passed between them, and Hans scribbled something on an envelope. At last he stood up. "He wants us to go now. He says we have been here long enough. He has given me an address."

We walked out through the bar; the man in the corner was still in his place.

After we had driven a couple of blocks, Hans pulled into the kerb with a jerk. "Well? What's the matter?"

"Tell us what he told you!"

"That someone like you—*very* like you—had been there for a drink only an hour before; that he had asked for accommodation.

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My friend gathered he wanted somewhere quiet to stay for a few days. He could not help, so he sent him to some others. I have the address. It is a flat in one of the blocks on Stalinallee."

"Was my brother alone?"

"He says that he was."

I hesitated for a moment, looking out of the car window. The sunshine of the early morning had gone, a grey blanket of cloud had piled up overhead, and now it was starting to drizzle.

"I don't want to be rude about your friend, Hans. But did you see the way he was looking at that man in the corner?"

"So you noticed that one—the one we think to be an informer?"

"I noticed, all right. And there was no hostility between them. It seemed to me more like a bond of some kind."

Hans' face darkened. "You mean . . .?"

"That it is a trap. It has been made all too easy for us. We walk into one café out of hundreds, and there's everything we want, even an address, laid out and waiting. I think it was planted, deliberately, all of it."

"You doubt me!"

"No, Hans, I don't. Or that landlord. You can't blame him if he was forced to do it."

Hans drummed a rhythm with his knuckles on the metal of the steering wheel. "I would have trusted Otto with anything," he said at last. "What do you want to do now?"

"Go on! They don't know that *we* know it's a trap: one up to us. I shall keep my eyes and ears open and walk right into it. And I'll tell you something else, Hans: I intend to walk out again, too!"

I turned to Lydia. "All right with you, darling?"

"There is nothing else we can do."

"All right, then. Hans."

The restless drumming of his fingers was more insistent. For a moment he looked very German. "I must explain," he said in some embarrassment. "If there is a trap, I cannot be involved. My past record, the things they might find out—I would never see West Berlin again. I will take you to this place, and that is all."

I felt sorry for him. "Right. Take us there as quick as you can, and then get to hell out of it. We understand. We'll get back somehow."

He started up and drove on. Soon we were in Stalinallee, the showplace of East Berlin. It was impressive, even in that misty drizzle. A wide straight street, double-tracked, and stretching as far as the eye could see, flanked on each side by towering cliffs of flats. They were white-fronted, at least ten stories high, and all the blocks were the same shape.

"Splendid, isn't it!" Hans was scornful. "But they didn't bother to finish it. There is only the front. The back joins on to the old ruins."

We drove on for about half a mile, and it was as if we were floating at the bottom of a white-walled canyon: no other colour, except the off-green of the patches of grass struggling to live on the

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verges and, high up, little red squares fluttering from windows to show that good Communists lived inside.

Hans pulled up in front of one of the blocks and said, "1557, seventh floor, back flat. The name is Abelsohn." There was finality in his voice.

I leaned forward from the back seat. "Thank you, Hans, for all you have done. Do I pay you now?" My hand went to my pocket.

"No, I will be paid at the Maüse Turm." He seemed to draw breath in the pause and then swung round, voice rising. "Look, Herr Armitage. I am not a coward; I fought bravely against you in the war. But this—what you suspect, and what you are making me begin to believe—if it is right, I dare not risk it.

"You take your passport—" he thrust it towards me—"and you bluff your way out. There would be awkward questions asked about you two from your authorities—but not about me. But this I will do, to prove something to myself—" He was banging with one hand on the steering wheel again as if to emphasise his torn feelings. "You see that turning?"

"Yes." I followed his pointing finger to a narrow sidestreet.

"I will park the car there, and wait ten minutes. Do you think you can get him out by that time?"

"If he will come," I said.

"He had better. I will wait just ten minutes. No more. And if you are not there then, you are on your own."

"All right, Hans." I gripped his arm. "Thank you for everything. And don't risk waiting longer."

I opened the door and got out. Lydia came after me. There was just time to hear him murmur, "Good luck," before the door slammed shut.

As we moved away, the taxi went forward and turned the corner to vanish from sight. I took Lydia's arm and moved towards the entrance. I knew we were very much on our own now.

Inside the doors everything was concrete, square and bleak. A passageway ran the length of each floor and, by the shortness of it, I could see that the building was narrow, out of proportion to its height. A severe stairway with a plain iron railing led up between each storey. We started to plod up, breathing in an odour of damp and disinfectant. On the sixth landing we paused to gain breath.

"Come and look here," said Lydia. She walked to the far end, at the back where a window had been let into the wall to give extra light. "Look," she said, "the whole thing is a fake—just as Hans said."

She was right. The new block we were in was cut off at the back like a cake, a rather badly-cut cake. The ends of walls stuck out in the rough way they do on the houses on each side of a bomb-site in London. There were even the same trusses and tie-bars anchoring the new to the old that lay beyond; the usual desolation of ruins open to the sky, in places so close that you could almost lean out and touch them. It looked like an etching of hell viewed from above.

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Lydia pointed. "Just down at the end of Stalinallee—it can't be more than half a mile—there is a square with five roads leading off it. It is all flat rubble, covered with those awful little shacks like the ones you've seen already. And my parents live in one of those shacks. If we can get Paul out, then pick them up—just as they are—and get them across in the car . . ."

"Yes, darling; I have promised. But Paul must come first."

"I know." Her face was very severe. "I've been thinking. Hugh. I must go in to Paul first. Alone."

"But Lydia—"

"It's the only way. I may be able to persuade him. You stay out of sight . . . the trump card. But if it is a trap, they may relax their guard after they have caught me—and that will give you a chance to do what you think best; even to give up and leave everything in the hands of your Colonel, if you wish. I must do it, Hugh. I owe it—to you—to lots of people. It is a kind of restitution. But kiss me first. Kiss me hard. I'm frightened. I need it."

I hated it, but I knew she was right. I held her close. It was a strange place to seal our love: the sixth floor of a block of flats in Stalinallee. I kissed her hard and swore silently that I would get her out of this.

She broke away quickly and ran up the last flight of stairs. She motioned to me to wait out of sight, and then rang the bell of the back flat. I heard the soft purr of the buzzer from somewhere inside the flat, but there was no sound of approaching footsteps. She rang again, but still there was silence. Then, suddenly the door moved. A hand and arm came out through the narrow opening and grabbed Lydia by her coat collar. A voice said, "I didn't think you'd keep us waiting long;" and she had gone—jerked inside—the door slamming after her.

I would have recognised that hand even if I had not known the voice. It was Bertil.

A second's wild panic was followed by a dull rage. I wanted to kick that door open, to hammer on it. Then came the slow knowledge that I had been right, it was a trap. My hand was raised to strike at the blank, smooth surface, but I let it fall, and tried to think.

It *was* a trap . . . He had not seen me, that was certain. But who else was inside? Perhaps not yet . . . Perhaps Paul had not arrived yet. And had Bertil got anyone with him? The thing to do was to go for surprise either way. How . . .?

Lydia had sprung the trap; and now it was up to me. And I remembered something I had noticed when we looked out from the landing below.

I tiptoed past the door and over to the twin window at the end of this landing, then very gently I raised the bottom sash and leaned out as far as I dared. Yes . . . I had been right.

The back of the new block had the same half-finished look, but here the gaunt ruins opposite did not block out the view. They

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were just as close, but the last of the tie-bars between the two were about four feet below me. Almost on a level, the wall of the burnt-out shell finished in a rough platform, about a yard wide. The distance was jumpable . . .

Then I made the fatal mistake of looking down. Unlike my brother, I cannot stand heights.

I stood for a moment with my eyes closed, trying to still the nausea.

When my head had stopped spinning, I turned sideways, looking along the level in the direction of that flat. I could see a window, and it was open, for the edge of a curtain flapped out as I watched. A ledge ran along from my window to that . . . It was reasonably wide, but sloped slightly downwards towards the outside edge. I could walk along it . . . just, if I didn't look down. And I had to try. I thought of Lydia, and of Bertil. It was the only hope of making a surprise entry.

"Don't look down . . . Don't look down," I kept on repeating to myself as I shuffled along on the brink of space, one foot in front of the other, one hand flat against the rough concrete of the wall.

I tried to keep my eyes on that window with the curtain flapping out of it . . . a sort of oasis at the desert's end. I tried to think of anything else but what lay below me: but the only other thing I could call to mind was Hans, waiting in his car in the alley, looking at his watch, counting off the minutes left, but not many.

I made it at last. For a second, while I stood still shadowed from the view of that window, I listened for sounds, in case it was the room they were in. But it didn't really matter if they were there. I realised I couldn't go back, because I couldn't turn round without looking down. I caught the edge of the window and lowered myself in feet first. For a moment I was terribly vulnerable, but I need not have worried. My feet found the floor of an empty kitchen.

I walked over to the far door, and bent down, listening; there was a rumble of voices, and by the pitch of them I knew that both belonged to men. So there *was* someone else there.

I pressed closer, ear to the keyhole, trying to catch the words.

Then I heard Paul, quite plainly. "I've told you already, Bertil, I'm ready to talk. But let the girl go. She can't help you."

Just like my brother, I thought. Weak, wicked, unreliable, deserving every name in the book; but when he's really reached the end of the line, when he's really on his own, some spark of decency appears and makes it impossible to hate him completely.

Bertil said, "I am the judge of that. The girl may have her uses. But you, my friend—I'm no longer sure how reliable you are. You have behaved in a very peculiar way lately." I could imagine Paul, mystified, but covering it with his usual mocking expression.

Paul's voice came again, "What do you mean?"

"That first you collaborate willingly; then I suspect that you play a double game. I make you come here to Germany with me,

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and you do so with some reluctance, but leave me and vanish when we have that unfortunate accident. All that, I can perhaps understand. But not this sudden reappearance, so eager to go on from where we first began. I thought that Lydia might brave the crossing . . . for her own reasons. That is why I spread a little net hoping to catch her, then use her to find you. I never dreamt it would be the other way round. You blundering in first . . . she following. There must be more affection between you than I thought."

Paul spoke a very short, very rude word, and said, " I'll tell you all I know."

" I'm sure you will . . . willingly, or no. We have our methods, which are very successful." His voice changed back from that underlying roughness to a tone of wonderment. " But I still cannot make out these changes of heart."

I glanced at my watch, and those ten minutes were up. Hans would have gone. It was no use waiting any longer. I did not know how many people were in that room, but this was a good time to find out. In one movement I turned the handle, flung open the door, and stepped inside.

" Here's the reason, Bertil."

He was standing in the middle of the carpet, back towards me, hands thrust deep in the pockets of that inevitable raincoat—the thought flashed across my mind that he must sleep in it.

As he swung round at the sound of my voice, his jaw dropped. At another time, in another place, it would have been comical, his mouth open, the sticking plaster over his eye, but there was nothing funny in what I saw. Lydia and Paul were the only other people there: and they were sitting apart, tied by their arms to two wooden chairs.

Bertil's face showed utter bewilderment for a second—but he was quicker than I was. In a game like this the professional has certain advantages, and as I began to move towards him one hand snaked out of his pocket, and it held a squat black automatic. There was a short tube sticking from the barrel, and I supposed it was a silencer.

" Get back against that wall! " The end of the thing was pointing straight at my stomach. " Now put your hands on top of your head . . . clasp them there and don't move. Thank you."

As I did what he told me, Paul, sitting tied to that chair opposite, looked at me with a defiant grin, the hair hanging over his eyes, and said, " You bloody fool . . . you pair of bloody fools. Why did you come and muck the whole thing up? "

No one answered. There was nothing to say. Only Bertil, recovering his composure, talked softly and fast as he walked across to me, and the gun dug sharply in my ribs as he searched my pockets with his free hand. He was muttering to himself, " So! The one thing I could not have thought of . . ."

He pulled out my passport. The cord of my pendulum was

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caught up in it, and he looked at the small ebony object suspiciously. "What's this?"

"Only a keepsake."

He tossed it aside, and it rolled with a delicate clatter across the bare floor and under a small table that held a telephone.

"Go over to that chair and sit down . . ." All the time the gun was sticking into my back. "Now we will make you as comfortable as the others." A length of rope appeared from behind me, and, one-handed, he tied it round my arms so that they were locked behind the chair. "Your passport too—" He went over to Paul and wrenched his passport from his breast pocket, then he compared it with mine. "So . . . the heavenly twins," said Bertil, throwing down the two passports. "I should have thought of that. It explains everything. Even the incomprehensible message I got from the café. I thought that man was drunk when he phoned to say you had come in alone, been directed here, and then gone back with Lydia and asked for yourself. It is so simple now— "

"Perhaps, Bertil. But which is which?"

From where I was tied, I could not see Paul's face, but I knew he would be turning on Bertil that mocking smile. And I sensed instantly how Paul wanted me to play it.

"Yes," I repeated. "Which is which?"

"What do you mean?" Two pink spots had appeared on Bertil's cheeks as he stood looking from Paul to me. He was flushed with anger now, and I could see more clearly the battered state of his face.

"I mean, Bertil," Paul's voice went on in the same lazy tone, "which of us knows what you want? Or do we both? Or have you got the wrong two out of a set of triplets? That would queer your bloody pitch."

The voice stopped as Bertil lunged forward, and there was the sound of a hand against flesh. "Keep quiet," he hissed. "I do the talking."

"Then why not tell us?" I asked. "Or try Lydia? She should know."

Lydia's voice came at once from my left, calm and indifferent. "Sorry, Bertil, but I haven't the slightest idea."

"So you all think to be funny!" he said, his voice husky with rage. "You laugh at me, but soon, I assure you, you will laugh on the other side of the face." He had lost his precise, perfect English. He paused for a moment, breathing hard. "I thought to handle the whole of this matter by myself. But now I shall have to get reinforcements. And with the two of you, plus Lydia, it will not take us long to find out which is which, as you so wittily put it. I have told you we have methods of persuasion." He walked over and put his hand on the telephone.

Paul's voice came again, and this time the laughing, lazy tone was gone. "All right, Bertil. I'll talk!"

I tensed my muscles. Was he really going to betray everything? Or was he simply gaining time? If reinforcements came, we were

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lost. But with Bertil alone against us, we had a chance. I waited for Paul to speak again, and I decided that, whatever he was up to, I would *make* a chance.

" I'm the one you want," he was saying. " Those two fools have just been trying to save me."

Bertil came away from the phone: " And how do you expect me to believe that? "

" I can prove it. Do you remember the notes I sent you back in England? Do you remember my handwriting? "

" Yes."

" Well, give me paper and pencil. Let me write something. It will be just the same. Then try my brother without letting him see my effort. You will find the two are completely different."

Now I knew that Paul was not betraying us—for our handwriting, in fact, was almost identical. I knew the moment of action was very near. Bertil was silent, and I could almost see all the possibilities racing through his mind. I offered up a silent prayer that he would not think of checking the handwriting in our passports. " All right," he said at last, " but no tricks." He felt in his pocket, bringing out a notebook and ball pen. " Here you are."

" Are you nuts? " said Paul. " How the hell can I write with my hands tied? "

Bertil stepped back. " So! You think I am such a fool? "

" All right," said Paul, " please yourself. Get your friends along. I shall find it most amusing to watch you telling your boss that you don't know which of us is which."

I watched Bertil hesitate. Then, slowly, he pulled out his gun again and leaned forward to untie Paul's ropes. I waited, tense, my legs well bent under me and my feet pressing against the floor.

" *Now!* " Paul yelled. I catapulted myself sideways, chair as well, thrusting with my feet as I butted my head at the small of Bertil's back. I reached him—but only just; I had not judged the distance well. The impact was only enough to throw him off balance for an instant. But as he fought to regain his footing, he trod on something—the ebony sphere of my pendulum which he had tossed so contemptuously to the floor.

His foot skidded on it, and he went down flat on his back with a crash. I tried to roll on him, but the chair hampered me. Half-stunned, he wriggled away and I shouted, " Out through the kitchen window, Paul . . . the way I came! "

I heard the noise of footsteps and then, from the kitchen, Paul's voice, " Dunno what the hell you mean, but I'm jumping for it. Come and get me, Bertil, you bastard. If you've got enough guts! "

Bertil was on his knees now. He looked towards the open door of the kitchen, and then at us. " Stay where you are," he panted. I saw his eyes flick to the telephone; guessed his thought. I kicked out hard with both legs, caught the table on which the telephone stood, and the instrument flew in an arc to the floor. I could see the base had cracked in half; probably useless. I could tell from Bertil's face that he thought so too. He knew he was on his own now.

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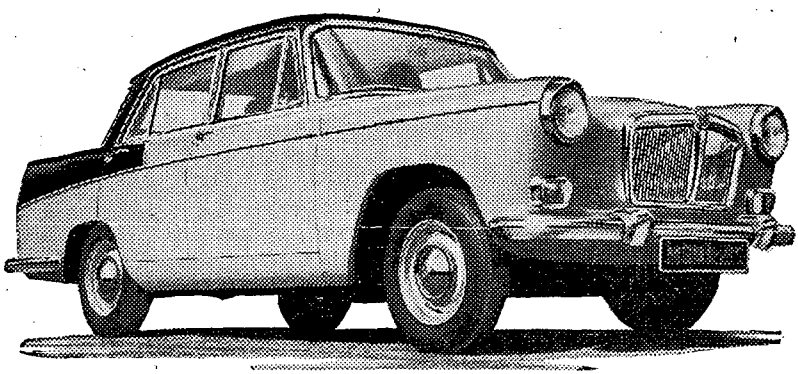

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He scrambled up and headed for the kitchen, gun in hand. The only sound was his heavy breathing, a soft scrabbling of someone else climbing on to the sill, and then, " Stay where you are—or I fire! "

Bertil's back was silhouetted in the open doorway now: an easy target, if only I could reach it. I rolled over, sobbing, trying to get my hands free. But it was no good . . . and then Bertil fired.

It sounded like a soft plop, and for a moment my heart turned over, but I knew he had not found his mark, for a reply came within seconds: a saucepan that came whistling through the opening, just missing his left ear. " Come and get me, you fat slug," said the other voice—that loved, mocking voice. " I'm jumping . . . now." Then a thud from some distance beyond.

It was too quick, and it wasn't from below; I knew he had not chosen that way out. I was dragging myself up to Lydia now, pushing the back of the chair towards her. " Try, darling, to reach and get my hands loose. I must see what's happening . . . I *must*."

She didn't speak, but I could feel her fingers fumbling, tearing at the cord. At last it slackened and I struggled to my feet, staggering through to the kitchen. Bertil had gone.

Bertil had followed; made that jump too; across and down the sickening gap to the top of the ruins. And Paul . . . he was safe, and well ahead. I saw him in the distance, a tiny figure running lightly, almost carelessly, along the top of the far wall that was at right angles to the one so close. I remembered, with thankfulness, the other difference between us. He had never worried about heights.

It was like a silent film, a bad, foggy film, through that sodden drizzle. I saw Paul slow down to a walk, then pick his way. The surface was not level, as it was here; it dipped as if huge mouthfuls had been bitten out where the weather had worn it away; it crumbled. I watched him stop, and ease one foot forward, testing, and the piece he was about to put his weight on fell away in a shower of dust to crash into the weeds of the basement below. No way on . . . no way down. He stood quite still peering over on each side. No way back, either. Bertil, crouching as he went on, was closing in fast.

I had to go to Paul, and I began to clamber over the windowsill, willing myself not to look down.

I could not see him shrug his shoulders as he turned to face the enemy, but I knew he did it. Then he was on one knee, tearing off pieces of brickwork, throwing them. He was shouting but I could not make out the words. The plop of Bertil's gun came faintly . . . one . . . two . . . three times. At the last one, I saw Paul stagger, nearly lose his balance, clutching at his shoulder. Then he crouched again. They were only feet apart. I thought of Lydia, waiting behind in that other room, still tied, but I could not go to her. I had to watch. I was praying that that slim figure would stay balanced on the rotting platform, with death waiting sixty feet below on either side. I could only hope for him . . .

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And then they were at each other's throats.

It did not seem as if one went to meet the other; they just collided, head on, like charging cattle. They were both flat now, that grey coat of Bertil's and the brown suit of Paul's, rolling from side to side on that narrow ledge. I could see puffs of dust as the masonry under them started to crumble. Then the struggling, locked bodies jerked sideways. They hung for a moment, suspended in the air, as if in slow motion; there was a thin scream as they plummeted down, still locked in an embrace . . . a horrible thud far below.

I could not look there; I was still watching the place where they had been. And then I saw the wall move and sag . . . bowed in towards where they had fallen. It started to crumble . . . It must have been the weight of the two bodies, the strain of the struggle. Then it collapsed with a noise like thunder. The noise was the only thing that differed from my dream of a week before.

I went back to the sitting-room and untied Lydia. I did not speak until I had finished and she must have guessed the truth by the look on my face, for she did not question me. I felt as I did in that dream . . . half dead, as if part of me had gone for ever.

When she stood up at last, I just said, " It's all finished. That wall came down on both of them. He's paid his debt."

" Oh, my darling . . .! " She held me close, and it was a great comfort, but it could not quite fill that aching void.

" We'd better get out of here," I said dully. " There will be a lot of people round after that noise."

" Yes." She turned and picked up something from the sofa. " Your passport, Hugh."

" Take Paul's too." I turned it over in my hands before putting it in my pocket. " I wouldn't like them to find that."

We went out of the flat and down the stairs, walking slowly, looking straight ahead. There were groups of people on each landing, standing, talking in whispers, as they peered out of the back window, looking at the rising clouds of foggy dust. They did not take any notice of us. We left the front entrance, turned right, and walked down the Stalinallee to the narrow turning where Hans had said he could wait. There was no car there . . . I hadn't expected it, but I had to be certain. My eyes travelled up to the end of the street, a cul-de-sac really, blocked at the top by ruins and rubble. " Paul," I said, " I've got to make sure."

It was getting dark now, earlier than usual because of the heavy clouds and the rain. We went hand in hand, stumbling over wet slabs of stone, loose bricks rattling away from under our feet, groping for hand-holds, as we circled back to the place where my brother had fallen. We were only halfway when a green figure came out from behind a wall, automatic rifle at the ready. " Halt! " It was a policeman. A volley of German followed.

" He wants to know what we are doing here," said Lydia quietly. " And he wants to see our papers."

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I pulled out a passport: whether Paul's or mine, I did not know or care. "English tourist," I said. "We hear big bang. We thought it was a bomb."

"No bomb." This one fancied his English. "Only hoodlums playing in ruins. Ruins come down bang. Hoodlums kaput—" He passed a finger across his throat. "We listen . . . no sound. We dig them out, perhaps, some day. But no bomb. All gone."

A smile then that showed a mouthful of metal teeth.

He looked at our passports carefully and then shot another sentence in German at Lydia. His English had dried up, and there was a hint of suspicion in his eyes.

"He wants to know what we are doing off the road. And where is our car."

I looked straight back at him. "In the Stalinallee. We just came to see."

He made a last effort. "Road better for tourist. Danger here. Falling ruins . . . hoodlums . . . rats." He gave a wide sweep of his arm to indicate all the dangers, and then handed back our passports. "You go now."

"Thank you."

We turned and trudged away towards the West.

"We can't go back on the road, Hugh." Lydia was looking back over her shoulder as she spoke. "He wasn't very happy about us. There may be others with much more intelligence there."

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" I promised to bring out your parents," I said. " I'll keep my word."

" I can take you straight to them, across these ruins."

" We've no car to get out. It'll be tricky."

" We'll use the Underground, Hugh. There's a station not a hundred yards from where they live. It is the only form of transport that goes straight through to the West. Look—it's so near."

She pointed; and ahead, beyond the desert of half darkness that surrounded us, I could see a ring of dancing lights. " That's the West, Hugh. That's freedom."

We tried to increase our pace. I did not mind the wet, the cold, the stumbling; but we had barely gone another hundred yards when I became chillingly aware of the rats. It was a slithering sound in the rubble near us; a feeling of being watched by thousands of eyes—non-human, waiting, scrabbling, scratching, pattering. We groped on in the thickening darkness and the rats kept level with us, edging a little closer every few yards. I could see their eyes now, tiny pinpoints of evil. Once, with a terrified squeal, an emaciated cat streaked across in front of us. A dark stream seemed to move forward from the right and engulf the cat in a rolling, heaving ball. The squealing stopped suddenly. Lydia gripped my arm tighter and tried to break into a run. " Don't," I begged her, " don't! You might fall. And then—" I did not have to finish the sentence.

Sometimes I stopped and threw chunks of masonry at the rats, but the only result was a slight extra movement of the black tide. At last the ground levelled, the scurrying on either side of us slowly dropped back, and we were walking on a road of sorts. We were soon among shacks, with lights showing at the windows. And then Lydia pointed. " That is the one, Hugh. That is my parents' home."

The shack was knocked together out of the usual corrugated iron and scraps of timber. I drew back at the door. " You go in and explain. I shall only confuse them. Be as quick as you can."

She murmured thank you, kissed me lightly and then, lifting the latch without knocking, she slipped inside. I heard voices raised, and then lowered again to a murmur. I leaned against the side of the hovel and waited, my collar turned up against the cold. I was facing the lights of the West, that ring of lights that meant freedom. All else round me was darkness. I wondered how it must feel to live like that for years. Three minutes . . . five passed. Then the door opened and Lydia beckoned me inside.

There was only the one room—bare, but spotlessly clean; a bunk in a corner, a table and two chairs, all made from packing-cases. The two old people looked at me briefly, half smiled, and returned their eyes trustingly to Lydia. They looked in their seventies, although they were probably both on the right side of sixty. The woman, I saw, was wearing a pair of heavy, broken boots that had been made for a man. I shook hands, firmly, without speaking, and Lydia told me, " My parents do not speak English,

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Hugh, but they say they are glad to welcome you to their home."

"What have you told them?"

"That we can take them with us, now, on the Underground, and find them a new home where they will be free and happy."

The old couple were looking at us with the eyes of spaniels, full of love and trust and fear and hope and doubt. I was suddenly impatient, though I tried to hide it. "Well, what on earth are we waiting for?"

"There is something I must explain," said Lydia. "Try to understand—please, Hugh. My parents have lived like this for so long; they have very little left; it is such a wrench to go with us . . . They want to take a few things with them, the last of their little treasures. They begged me to ask you—"

"I think I understand," I said gently. "But they have got to be quick. Just one case."

"Hugh." She was looking straight at me. "There's one thing I should have told you. Anyone can get straight through on the Underground, provided they have papers and no heavy luggage. The assumption is that those with such things are not day visitors. And they are turned back."

"Let's risk a little case," I said. "We can't have bad luck all the time."

She came close again, and kissed me. The old couple stood watching, and somehow the battered shack became a brighter, warmer place. A soft flow of German between daughter and parents again; a sort of mild argument. Time stood still.

Lydia turned to me at last. "They are coming. They are bringing only a small case. They want just a moment to choose."

I waited, watched, as their eyes wandered round the room. There was little there, it was an easy choice. I saw the old lady get a battered fibre case out from under the bunk and walk slowly round the room that had been her home for so long.

An old cuckoo clock on the wall, two Dresden plates from a shelf; those she took. She went to a chest and wrapped them carefully in the folds of some darned, faded men's underwear, the relic of a silk scarf. Nothing else . . . she snapped the case shut, and then stood up straight, talking in German to Lydia.

When she turned to me her eyes were full of tears. "My mother says . . . she will come. She thinks you are a kind man. She hopes she will know you well . . . and that she and father will be a credit to you."

I couldn't bear any more. "Please, Lydia. Let's go."

"Just a minute—" She spoke to them again, and there was authority in her voice. The old couple stood there, the suitcase in front of them, nodding in silence. "I've given them the drill, Hugh. We go separately, but they follow close behind us. They take their suitcase, they catch whatever train we catch. And until we are across that border they do not know us."

"The case . . .?"

"I have explained. They will put it down when they are in the

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train. They know that if it is questioned, they must disown it."

We went out first. I didn't want to look back, but I couldn't help seeing the shadow of the two of them as they lowered the light for the last time. It was a crazy shadow: the old man, elongated against the wall, in his battered green hat. What did they think of in those last moments? Memories? They could not have been too happy. The future, they were taking on trust. No, just a guttering light dwindling on what had been a home . . .

We walked arm in arm, Lydia and I, slowly, so that we could hear the old people coming on behind us, but fast enough to give no chance for them to change their minds and go back.

We walked down a labyrinth of dark passages until we saw a faint glow in the darkness; beyond, the glitter of the West, so close, so tempting.

"This is the Underground," Lydia said. "Now we have to be careful."

"Lydia, I haven't got any East marks to pay the fare. They, your parents, must have a few. Can't we borrow enough from them?"

"Don't be a fool!" As her arm dug into mine, she sounded almost vicious. "We play it as we have done. We are British tourists whose taxi has deserted them, and have been stranded. If necessary, make a fuss about it. The louder you shout, the better they'll understand . . ."

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We got to the booking hall, and it was dim, dull, and cheerless. We waited, in the same patient queue, until our turn came. I walked up to the window. " I want two tickets to—" And then the awful thing came. As I offered the West mark note, I could not remember the name of any station.

" Uhlandstrasse," said Lydia quickly from beside me. But the clerk had already pressed a buzzer on his desk, and one of those hated green uniforms had come forward from behind the barrier and was striding towards us.

He was a tall, pale-faced, thin-lipped young man, his eyes magnified in their intensity by rimless glasses. He took our passports and examined them carefully, listening to my lame story of our lost taxi with apparent indifference. " You seem to have walked a long way and a difficult way, sir, to get back here." He was staring down at the wet turn-ups of my trousers, our mud-stained shoes.

I felt Lydia nudge me. " Yes, we have," I said, raising my voice. " If you had some street lighting here, it wouldn't have happened! Stumbling about in those awful ruins . . . chased by rats. I think we were lucky to make it at all."

" I agree. Just one moment, please."

He went into the office and, through the glass window, I saw him checking our names against a long list. A train came into the station beneath us, then rumbled away, the noise fading into silence. No one in the queue behind us tried to push forward; there was no protest, no murmuring at the delay. They just waited patiently.

The policeman came back and handed over our papers with an ironic bow. " It is all in order. I apologise for your inconvenience. We will endeavour to complete the illuminations of our city before the gracious lady and gentleman honour us with another visit." He took the five-mark note I was still holding. " I will be glad to change this for you." When he had counted some coins into my hand, he bowed again. I bought the tickets and we were through.

I saw Lydia glance backwards as we walked down the flight of steps that led to the platform.

" Are they—? " I muttered.

" Yes. Just behind. The case as well. He must have passed it."

The station was worse, in every respect, than the grimmest one on the inner circle at home. We stood, not daring to look round again, waiting for a full, nerve-racking five minutes before the next Westbound train arrived. It was old, shabby, and had that dreary smell of wet wood and disinfectant. We got in and sat down, and for the first time I had a good view of the old people.

Lydia's father had put the case down carefully in the space by the entrance doors, then joined his wife on a seat about two away, facing ours. The train moved off with a jerk; the station lights slid past. They sat silent in the rattle and the roar, the old couple with white hair, the woman with her scarf, the man in his battered green hat . . . silent, staring at us without recognition.

One station . . . two. I don't remember their names, but when

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the second had passed, Lydia touched my arm. "The next is Potsdamerplatz," she breathed in my ear as I bent over to catch the words. "The frontier. Another check . . . they board the train. Don't look at that case, whatever you do."

We rumbled on. Through all the noise, a feeling was swelling up round me, a sort of unbearable, growing tension. There were not many people in our carriage but everyone I could see was looking straight in front of them, wooden-faced. I could feel my heart thudding against my ribs. I knew just how they must be thinking. POTSDAMERPLATZ. The name on the station board went by in the lights; we slowed . . . stopped. The brakes came off with a hiss of compressed air. Then there was dead silence.

Thump . . . thump . . . thump. My heartbeats seemed so loud that someone else must hear them; just as I should have sensed theirs. But there was nothing. With a creak, the door slid open and two of the East Berlin Police came into the carriage.

They worked together, quietly and quickly. They checked all papers and looked in a couple of shopping bags. They lingered a moment longer with our passports, but handed them back with a bow. The old couple were last . . . nearest the door.

I tried to look straight in front of me; not at them, nor at what lay beyond in the other entrance. But it was too much. As I lowered my eyes for a moment, I saw one of the policemen in the act of handing back their papers. The other, a pace farther on, was staring at the floor. He bent down, picked up the case, turning it round by the handle, slowly. A word was jerked to his colleague, and they started to walk the length of the carriage together, stopping to ask each passenger a question in turn.

They were level with us now. "Is this your case, sir?" Again that smooth, terrible politeness.

"No," I said, and my voice sounded forced and unreal, not mine.

The old people were last. It just happened that way from the route that had been taken round the carriage. I felt a movement beside me, glanced down quickly, and Lydia's knuckles were white as her hand bit into the edge of the seat like a vice. I could not bear to see her face. I had to look back at what was happening.

The policeman was speaking to them now. They raised their eyes to his face and slowly shook their heads in unison. He turned and looked up and down the length of the carriage in a baffled sort of way, then knelt and opened the case on the floor: the old cuckoo clock, the two Dresden plates, the darned underclothes, the scarf. All came out one by one and lay there: pathetic, somehow so naked on the dirty boards. The old couple had not turned their heads, though they must have heard what was happening. They just stared straight in front of them while all they had left in the world was turned over by strange hands.

The policeman stuffed the contents back, shut the case, and got to his feet. He gave a shrug of his shoulders, picked it up, and walked with his colleague off the train. Only for a second, while it disappeared from sight as it was carried along the platform, did

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they both look that way. Only for a second, and I could see the old lady's eyes were filled with tears, her lips trembling.

The doors shut. We moved off. As the station lights fell behind, the tension lifted like the passing of a thunderstorm. Behind me a couple began to talk. "Come," said Lydia, "we can go and sit with them now."

They were close together, holding hands. We sat opposite, and just looked at each other. There was nothing I could say. I just relaxed, thinking of all that had happened, all that would have to be done.

Mother . . . I knew she would be glad Paul had finished that way, not in gaol. The Colonel . . . I had kept my bargain. I had no information, but Paul had not talked. Lydia . . . only a glowing future there. Last, these two in front of me . . . going into a new, strange life.

I leaned forward and gently touched the old lady's knee. She looked at me, and then at her husband.

For the first time, they both smiled. © Christopher Landon 1960

★ ***Timberbeast, a fast-paced, new short novel by Verne Athanas, appears in next month's Argosy.***

SOLUTIONS to FRITTO MISTO

on page 14

1. *According to the ancient Romans she came under the protection of Juno, goddess of marriage and queen of the gods.*
2. *Fawning time for deer, from* 15 *days before midsummer to* 15 *after.*
3. *Wind blowing from rifleman's left-hand side.*
4. *York, Canterbury, Shropshire, Oxford.*
5. *A tylopod is an animal with padded feet, i.e. a camel.*
   Precatory means expressing entreaty.
   Culm is both coal dust and the stem of a plant.
6. *a. Disraeli,* 1878*; b. Neville Chamberlain,* 1938.
7. *a.* 7*; b.* 39*; c.* 10.
8. *Queen Elizabeth I.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Competent.* 6, *Toad.* 8, *Over.* 9, *Iniquity.* 10, *Atom.* 11, *Reflate.* 12, *Deliver.* 16, *Potato.* 18, *Examines.* 19, *Restates.* 20, *Candid.* 21, *Sundays.* 24, *Apostle.* 27, *Mint.* 28, *Upstream.* 29, *Erst.* 30, *Seed.* 31, *Harshness.*

Down. 2, *Olive.* 3, *Phial.* 4, *Trustworthy.* 5, *Toyed.* 6, *Tradition.* 7, *Above.* 11, *Reports.* 13, *Emancipates.* 14, *Residue.* 15, *Beast.* 17, *Antedated.* 22, *Unite.* 23, *South.* 25, *Sheen.* 26, *Limes.*

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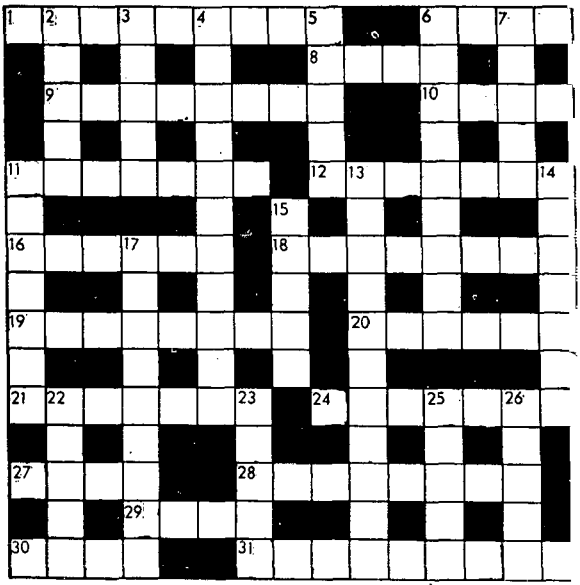
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

1 'E and the printer at the tent are qualified (9).

6 This amphibian was a road-hog (4).

8 With 7 is extra (4).

9 Sin, and I quit in the middle (8).

10 A feline male can be split (4).

11 Referee not on time? Blow him up again (7).

12 Rescue ending in organ (7).

16 Vessel at zero for the veg. (6).

18 Tests—and I mean sex! (8).

19 Repeats about America? (8).

20 Half dance did become ingenuous (6).

21 A month of ——? Never! (7).

24 Evangelist noted for acts (7).

27 Plant simply coins money (4).

28 From mouth to source, of course (8).

29 Formerly in Queer Street (4).

30 See a penny pip (4).

31 " 'Tis not enough no —— gives offence " (Pope) (9).

Down

2 Popeye's girlfriend almost (5).

3 Hi, pal! Have a small bottle (5).

4 Thus T.T. worry becomes reliable (11).

5 Played to ye penny (5).

6 " The youth of America is their oldest —— " (Wilde) (9).

7 Seaman starts on top (5).

11 News items about harbours? (7).

13 Frees, but can mean cat pies (11).

14 The rest's about the side with you in it (7)

15 Be a little saint, animal! (5).

17 Dad's sister with a beau? No, it's anticipated (9).

22 Tune I weld together (5).

23 This wind is Notus (5).

25 Fine polish is more than seen (5).

26 Acid fruits sound alkali (5).

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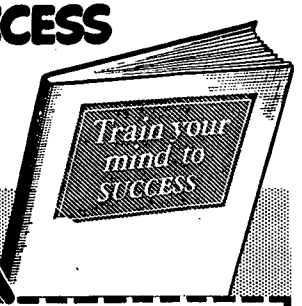

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